SHORT STORIES

No. 693.] For Week Ending April 12th, 1902. [One Penny.

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Shakespeare.

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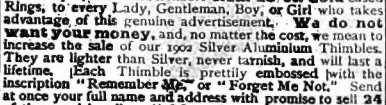
A RARE CHANCE.



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SHORT STORIES

No. 693.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending April 12th, 1902.

A Timely Intervention.

THE DIFFERENCE A LETTER MADE.

JOHN SEPTIMUS GAYTHORNE BROWNE, General Manager to Messrs. Gradgrind, Flint and Co., the eminent City merchants, entered his well-appointed office at 9.30 A.M. precisely. He was a large, deliberate man, carefully groomed, exhaling prosperity at every pore.

He slowly removed his glossy silk hat, disclosing to view a squat, bald head, from which the hair had receded until it seemed to be endeavouring to hide itself in the creases of his crimson neck. He placed his hat upon its accustomed peg and moved majestically across the room towards his chair of state; paused a moment to raise the skirts of his superfine frock coat, then slowly subsided in the cushioned depths, adjusted his gold-rimmed *pince-nez* and gave his attention to the letters heaped upon the desk in front of him.

Tap! tap! tap! Three gentle, timid, agitated knocks re-echoed softly through the room. Mr. Browne slowly raised his head and listened.

Tap! tap! tap! Three quicker, louder knocks, like the agitated beating of a frightened child's heart. Opening his capacious mouth, Mr. Browne emitted a stern, uncompromising—

"Come in!"

The person who responded to this ungenial invitation was a sallow, weary-looking, weedy young man about twenty-five years of age, poorly, but neatly dressed. His features were not uncomely, but his tired eyes, thin cheeks and drooping mouth bore silent witness to crushed emotions, dead hopes, and the endless dull monotony of a clerk's existence.

"Well—ah—Watkins?"

"I wish to ask you, sir, whether you cannot see your way to give me a slight increase of salary. I have worked for the firm over seven years," said Watkins diffidently.

"Really—ah—Watkins——" The worthy Mr. Browne paused a moment and gazed severely at his subordinate.

"If you please, sir."

"I do not please, Watkins. Understand me, I—do—not—please! Are you not cognisant of the reputation, the high standing, the—er—great importance of the firm which does you the honour of employing you?" said Mr. Browne pompously.

"Yes, sir, I—but—but——" ventured Watkins.

"Well?"

"You know, sir, if I might venture to suggest such a thing, that the reputation of the firm won't pay my rent, nor keep my wife and me!" he blurted out. "Besides, sir——"

"Enough, Watkins, enough!" commanded the outraged Browne. "How dared you, how could you, speak so flippantly of your magnanimous employers? You—you are really—er—outrageous, Watkins!"

The suppliant looked uneasily at his senior, who rose majestically from his chair, slowly raised his *pince-nez* in one hand, placed the other behind him, and said, with chilling emphasis:

"What—what, may I ask, has this eminent firm, of which I am a most unworthy servant—this great, respected Corporation—ahem—in whose bounty you have shared for seven long years, to do with the private affairs of its innumerable employees? If, Watkins, you have been foolish enough—improvident enough!—I had almost said, criminal enough, to marry! Then, sir"—here he paused, looked steadily at Watkins, and then in the awful accents of a judge passing sentence of death, resumed:

"You must be prepared to pay the utmost penalty of your rash, your wicked act." A comprehensive, solemn sweep of the arm concluded his peroration.

"But, sir——"

"Have you no work to perform, Mr. Watkins?"

Watkins turned and left the presence without a word. Had he remonstrated with his senior, or pressed his case, he would have been dismissed. Clerks—Heaven knows—are cheap enough, and only too ready to step into another man's shoes.

The reader has doubtless discovered that John Septimus Gaythorne Browne delighted in the sonorous tones of his voice, and loved the rolling lilt of the pompous and in-

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ated sentences which he addressed to all and sundry.

It was his habit, when alone, to harangue for practice the office furniture, and on this occasion he turned to a large, glass-fronted book-case, and sternly ejaculated:

"I cannot, I will not, allow my clerks to enter the bonds of holy matrimony. It unfits them for the station to which an all-wise Providence has called them. It unsettles their minds and fosters preposterous desires. They come to me and say, the reputation of the firm will not suffice to pay our rents, to—— Umph! what blasphemy—what—what—Radicalism!" For the moment words failed the righteously indignant orator. He slowly passed his hand across his brow as if to erase a hateful memory, then heavily resumed his seat. He rang a bell. A messenger entered.

"Ah—send Mr. Watkins to me without delay."

"Yessir!" replied the man, and vanished.

"Ah, Watkins, I have given your request some slight consideration during your short absence from the—ah—apartment. I really forget what salary we pay you."

"Twenty-five shillings a week, sir."

"Is it not the usual practice to calculate per annum in this establishment?"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I should have said sixty-five pounds a year."

"Just so—ah—Watkins, just so. Pray do not allow a similar error to again occur. And now, you, sir, do you not consider you are exceedingly well remunerated for such services as you perform?"

"Hardly, sir. Believe me, it is a desperate struggle for us to live."

"Us? Us?"—ponderous mental effort to understand the application of the pronoun—"Ah, yes—of course—I had forgotten for the moment that you had—er—perpetrated matrimony. Let me see, sixty-five pounds—per—annum"—remains silent in rapt contemplation of the beneficence of the firm.

"Yes, sir—that's all," said Watkins ruefully.

"Eh?" Sudden awakening from the beatific vision. "What more do you want? Watkins!"—shaking an admonitory finger with vast solemnity—"Watkins! Matrimony, pernicious state, has warped your native generosity, has blasted the—ahem—the magnanimity of your heart. You lust after the flesh-pots of Egypt, and desire the riches that perish. A contented mind, Watkins, is a continual feast." Watkins was not so sure of this. "Be contented with your station. It is an honourable and useful one. Be happy upon the liberal salary you at present receive—even—ahem—even as I am. Have the goodness, Watkins, to close the door from the outside, if you please."

J. S. G. Browne leant back in his comfortable arm-chair, placed his finger-tips gently together, crossed his august legs and beamed placidly at the ceiling as Watkins hastily retired.

"I apprehend," he remarked, to the gilt cornice, "no further trouble with my gentleman. I flatter myself I made a great impression upon his sordid soul!" And he calmly gazed at an office chair for confirmation and applause.

Verily, it was a famous victory.

* * * * *

Mrs. Watkins put down her needle-work with a sigh and looked around her "home," a dingy, sunless, small bed-sitting room on the third-floor back of a gaunt, dull house in Pimlico.

The room contained the worthless casual household gods left behind by various former occupants. Three chairs, one badly crippled, of incongruous shapes, a small deal table somewhat the worse for wear, and an ancient sofa, which looked as though much sitting on had crushed its feeble strength. A crazy bed lolled helplessly against the wall, and sundry fly-blown texts and bilious-looking oleographs hung round the room.

The carpet straggled about the floor, a frowsy patch-work. The fire-grate, the bars of which were bent with long ill-usage from the poker, was small, and seemed to deprecate the idea that heat should be expected of it, or that anyone should be foolish enough to try to cook anything upon it. A many-shaded blue enamelled washstand, the one-time property of the landlady's "poor, dear, dead husband's sainted mother," and a cheap aggressively new chest of drawers, completed the *tout ensemble*, which occupied the greater part of the available space.

Mrs. Watkins glanced wearily from one poor article to another, and then resumed her work. How pale, how tired she looked, as she sat by the window in the fading light plying her busy needle.

Twelve months ago, a bright, happy girl of twenty, with a tumbled aureole of pale gold hair about her shapely head, laughing blue eyes, long lashes, arched brows, and cheeks as fresh as sweet wild roses blooming upon a roadside hedgerow; a winsome, laughing, healthy country girl, she had married Arnold Watkins.

Twelve weary months had drifted slowly by. Twelve months of poverty, mean shifts and petty debt; of pinching and screwing; of carking self-denial and hand-to-mouth existence, had left their marks indelibly upon her. The bitterness of narrow means had galled her tender heart, and staled the freshness of her youthful face. She had grown pale and silent 'neath a load of petty cares, and faded like a lily of the valley, in a heated room.

The kind old doctor her husband had consulted shook his head and ordered rest, fresh air, and change of scene.

"My boy," he said, "a long sea voyage is the only remedy I can prescribe. Take her out of this or you will lose her altogether."

As she sat by the window working, she mused of the happy days that seemed so far away, lost in a dim, remote, almost unreal past.

Sometimes the mirage of a cherished memory would startle her with its distinctness. One such there was. She was at the seaside and *he* was with her. The pale-green wavelets sparkled in the sunlight, danced gaily to the beach, and creamed upon the stones. The white-winged yachts flitted hither and thither. The distant deep-blue island, mist veiled, lay low along the far horizon. The faintly-breathing wind kissed her fair cheeks and softly sighed in tender unison to *his* murmuring voice, as he whispered:

"Darling, I love you! Will you be my wife?"

The joyous laugh of the little ones who played the livelong day upon the sands throbbed in the air as she had whispered in his ear a trembling:

"Yes, Arnold, for I love you!"

In the brief, bright happy days that followed their engagement, they had roamed about the seashore and across the breezy downs, planning, as young folks will, a future full of kindnesses and joy. They built of unsubstantial air a rose-clad cottage in a fragrant garden wherein to live, to love and labour all their days. With what confiding tenderness and courage had they viewed the roseate future!

"Dreaming, little one?"

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Her husband's voice dispelled the happy day-dream. She rose from her seat and put away her work.

"What news, Arnold, dearest?" she cried, as she bustled about her husband, smilingly assisting him to remove his overcoat.

"Ill news, sweetheart," he replied moodily, as he dropped into a chair. "Old Blowhard Browne won't raise my screw."

"Oh, Arnold, how unkind of him!"

"Unkind? His bread is buttered both sides, and he doesn't care a rap for anyone else. I did what I could, but you know he sacked poor old Johnson, who had been in the firm for over fifteen years because he asked for a rise. Said the firm couldn't afford to pay two pounds a week, and hoped Mr. Johnson would get it elsewhere. Beastly shame, I call it!"

"Arnold!" exclaimed his wife reprovingly.

"So it is, my dear. They grind the very soul out of a fellow, pay him the wages of a scavenger, and expect him to wear a top hat, frock coat and all the other useless paraphernalia. 'The credit of the house, you know, *must* be maintained,' and a fellow must starve on buns and glasses of milk to dress for the 'credit' of the people who employ him. It is cruelty, my darling—absolute, tyrannical cruelty!" he cried, with great vehemence.

"Dearest, don't be so angry," she remonstrated.

"Angry? I'm sick and tired of it! They break a fellow's spirit, and fling him into the streets when they have done with him. A clerk, my girl, has neither body to nourish, nor soul to save, Heaven help him! Nice outlook for us, isn't it?"

His little wife made no reply to the outburst, but crept into his arms and raised her wan, but smiling face to his.

"God bless you, darling!" he said, and kissing her fondly, he held her closely to his breast.

"Arnold," she said, "we owe poor Mrs. Burke a fortnight's rent. She is a 'poor lone widder,' you know, and she must have the money to-morrow. Do you know, dearie, I am going to pawn my engagement ring to-morrow."

"No, no, old girlie, don't do that. Put my watch away instead."

"Really—ah—Watkins——"
The worthy Mr. Browne paused a moment and gazed severely at his subordinate.

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"No, dearest, I shall pawn my ring. But, oh!" she cried half-tearfully, "it is so hard to have to part with it. No, I'm not crying a bit! Don't, you saucy boy, here comes Mrs. Burke with your dinner."

But he did.

* * * * *

Sadly, with reluctant steps, Mrs. Watkins approached the pawnbroker's shop—that bourne from which few articles, once pawned, return. Her errand, commonplace enough with the needy, was new to her, and caused her acute embarrassment.

She lingered a moment ere crossing the road which lay between her and her dreaded destination; took from her pocket the precious ring and gazed upon it through a mist of tears. Closing her hand again to guard the sacred treasure, she raised her eyes timidly and saw the curious sign, and wondered at it in a vague, dull way. Her eyes then wandered to the legend writ in staring gilt above the door and windows—

"Moses—Pawnbroker and Jeweller. Money lent on Plate."

The statement, plain and prosaic, excited disquieting ideas within her breast. Her heart throbbed painfully; a vague, unreasoning sense of shame oppressed her agitated mind. She, so brave last night before her loved, admiring husband, now trembled like a startled fawn.

Glancing furtively now left, now right, she hastily crossed the road, approached the shop and hovered uneasily about it; peeping first into one window and then into the other; making several attempts to venture across the threshold but each time pausing irresolutely just without the door.

At last she found herself within the hateful place. A voice from somewhere in the dim interior fell harshly upon her startled ears:

"Well, ma'am, what can I do for you?"

She tried to answer but could not. She unclasped her trembling hands and placed her treasure upon the grimy counter. The owner of the voice picked it up and examined it minutely. How guilty she felt. She wondered whether he would ask her to whom the ring belonged, and how she had obtained possession of it. The blood rushed to her face. She felt sure the man would notice her confusion. Shame, uncertainty, and dread held riotous possession of her breast. To her surprise and great relief he simply asked:

"'Ow much?".

"I beg your pardon?"

"'Ow much?"

"I really do not know, I'm sure; it is a very good ring."

"Ring's all right. Wot d'y' want on it?"

"What will you lend?"

"Eighteen shill'n's. That do?"

"Oh, thank you! Yes!"

The necessary formalities were quickly complied with, the money promptly paid, and Mrs. Watkins breathed the outside air once more.

As she hastened homeward, she was conscious of a strong desire to laugh aloud or cry heartily, she knew not which. Her thoughts were curiously jumbled. She had eighteen shillings in her pocket—she could pay Mrs. Burke—could look her straight in the face once more. But the ring?—ah! that dear, dear, precious ring which he had given her—the glistening token of their mutual love. It was gone! That harsh-voiced man with the dirty fingers had it. She would never see it again, never; she could not bear to lose it! she would go back again to the horrid shop! No, she could not—must not—Mrs. Burke must and should be paid.

She hurried along, her thoughts keeping time with her echoing footsteps. She reached the house, entered, ran upstairs, threw herself upon the bed and sobbed and sobbed until she fell asleep.

* * * * *

Cautious, shuffling steps came along the passage and stopped at the door. A gentle knock. A pause. A louder knock. Another pause. Knock the third, and loudest. The handle softly turned, the door swung slowly open and admitted a tall, bony, middle-aged female dressed in rusty black. Her thin, hard mouth, hooked nose, dull eyes, angular features, leaden complexion, and furrowed forehead told of brusque, unkindly usage from the world and the flesh. She stooped a little as though she carried a burden, and faltered as she moved across the room towards the bed.

"Poor dear! She's sleepin' like a babby. An' ain't she like my poor, lost 'Loo'!" she muttered, with a sad, world-weary expression upon her uncomely face.

"Shall I 'tote' you along, Nell?" said her husband.

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"She'd a bin just about her age if she'd only lived, poor darlin'! Why, she's bin a-cryin'! She *is* like Loo, an' fadin' just the same."

As Mrs. Burke bent towards the sleeper something like a smile of soft compassion suffused her grim features as she watched the peaceful slumber of her "third-floor back."

The sleeper stirred, sighed, awoke. She seemed somewhat astonished to see Mrs. Burke, angel-like, guarding her bed.

"I made bold, Mrs. Whatsname, to come in as I couldn't make you 'ear, and I found you a-sleepin' like a noo born babe. I 'adn't the 'eart to wake you, so I waited till you woke yourself. Can you now, Mrs. Whatsit, mum, let me have something on account. That landlord o' mine is pesterin' for 'is rent, an' he's bin 'ere to-day a-threatenin' to put the baileys in if I don't pay up sharp."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Burke," cried Mrs. Watkins eagerly, "Here are eighteen shillings."

"No, Mrs. Whatsname, I won't take all that. 'Alf a soverin' will do me. You 'aven't no more than you knows what to do with. Ah! while I thinks of it, 'ere's a letter what come while you was out." said Mrs. Burke as she hurried from the room, leaving eight shillings and the letter upon the table.

"Mrs. Burke! Mrs. Burke! you *must* take it all!"

But Mrs. Burke was hastening downstairs as fast as her feeble legs would carry her, muttering as she went: "Ain't she like my poor, lost Loo!" and wiping her weak eyes with the corner of her large white apron.

"God bless poor Mrs. Burke!" said Mrs. Watkins, as she gently closed the door. Then, taking up some needlework, she sat down and commenced to work.

It was not long before she heard a well-beloved footstep on the stairs. She arose, opened the door and ran into her husband's longing arms.

"Arnold, here is a letter for you, dear," she said, as soon as he would let her speak.

"A letter, little one? I expect it's an unpaid bill!" he replied, as he took it from the table.

"Postmark Melbourne! Addressed in a strange handwriting to my old home! Been re-addressed twice! Who on earth is it from?"

Mrs. Burke's faltering feet were heard ascending the stairs, so he placed the letter in his pocket until she had set the table and quitted the room.

As soon as her back was turned he took the letter from its hiding-place, tore it open, extracted the contents and read aloud:—

"West's Hotel, Melbourne,
"June 6th, 1901.

"My dear Nephew,—I have addressed this letter to the old home in the hope that it will find you. I am not used to writing so will say what I have to say in as few words as possible.

"I daresay you have heard your dear mother speak of her brother Ben, who went to Australia years ago. I am he. I have made a pile—have neither chick nor child of my own, and want you to come out to me.

"I inclose £100.

"If you decide to come it will pay your passage. If you decide to stay at home, bank it.

"Let me know by what boat you sail—if you sail, and believe me to be. Your affectionate uncle;

"Benjamin Smith.

"*P.S.*—If you are married tote the family along."

"Shall I 'tote' you along, Nell?" said her husband.

"Oh, yes, please, dearie!" she replied enthusiastically.

* * * * *

Some three weeks after the above recorded events. the good ship *Star of the East* steamed rapidly down channel *en route* for the Antipodes.

The passengers had gathered on the decks to watch the receding shores of dear old England lying cloudlike far astern, and growing fainter in the dim, calm twilight.

A little apart from the others stood Arnold Watkins and his wife, bidding a silent adieu to their native land.

"Dearest," said Arnold, "let us go below. Good-night, old England; soon we shall say 'good-morning' to young Australia, where health and wealth await us."

And as they turned away the last misty trace of England faded into the night.

Arthur H. Budden.

Not According to Order.

A youth, who directed his tailor to make his trousers in the "latest style, to fit like the skin," returned his trousers after one trial, remarking, "They were not according to order." He "could sit down in his skin, but could not in his trousers."

Advantage of Having a Sister.

"Bessie," said Adolphus to his sister, "I have taken a fancy to a young lady with whom I am but slightly acquainted, and would like to know what her faults are. How can I find out?" "Praise her to her young lady acquaintances!" said Bessie.

Obtaining Money Falsely.

She: "You told me before we were married that you loved me for myself alone, and now I find that it was my fortune that won you." He (coldly): "Well?" She: "Well, I'll have you arrested for obtaining money under false pretences."

What the Difference Was.

The following conversation, reported by a friend, was recently overheard between two brothers, aged four and six years: "Winny, tell me what is the difference between a bicycle and a tricycle?" Elder (with patronising air): "Why, Ray, don't you know that? If a man takes the thing home to see how he likes it, it is a tricycle; but if he buys it outright it is a bicycle."

They Hadn't Rung.

Two ladies stood on the doorstep of a friend's house waiting for admission, and they became very impatient at the delay. "It's very odd to be kept waiting at Mrs. Darley's," said one. "The door is usually opened so promptly." "So it is. I'm getting very tired." "I wonder if there is absolutely no one in the house?" "Of course there are people in. We'll ring again." "You rang before, didn't you?" "Why no. I thought you rang?" "Well, I was sure you rang. How ridiculous!" "Yes, isn't it?" Then one of them rang and the door was opened.

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AT THE . . . . . LAST HOUR.

The Mystery of the One-Eyed Prince.

It was three years ago to-day that I first made the acquaintance of the two young princes, Brahbee. How the younger died you have learnt from the papers. Why he died I will endeavour to explain more precisely than you will ever gather from the minutest report that will be published.

It was in the country house of Sir Francis Gubyon that I was first introduced to these two strange young princes.

As usual, Sir Francis had his house full. He loved to entertain in that sumptuous and wholesale way that gave him the reputation of being the best host in all the country.

The hunting season was in full swing, and I had been invited down for the last two or three weeks of my winter vacation.

Of all that gay assemblage I need hardly add the two princes were the centre of attraction.

Although I was before long on fairly intimate terms with these young men, yet, in common with my fellow guests, I found it quite impossible to distinguish between them. They were both short, and both wore their hair thick and curly. In fact they were so absolutely alike that no one would believe that they were not twins. This, however, was not the case, and the elder was, I afterwards learnt, more than three years older than his brother. They were both very dark skinned, but in every other respect quite English, for they had been born and educated in England.

As if they delighted in perplexing their acquaintances with regard to their identity they persisted in dressing exactly alike. Even the very watch chains they wore were of the same pattern.

One morning at breakfast I happened to find myself seated next to one of these princes. I found him an exceedingly gentlemanly and well-read young man. I think he must have taken a great fancy to me, for before the meal was over he had told me a great deal about his personal affairs.

The two princes, I learnt, were about to visit their native country for the first time. Prince Frederick Brahbee, I gathered, was the name of my companion, who was the elder of the two brothers, and had just come into a large estate and fortune in the land of his fathers.

While we were thus chatting, I happened to glance across the table. Seated exactly opposite was the younger prince looking as black as thunder, and doing his utmost to catch the attention of his brother.

My companion, however, seemed purposely to avoid his eye, and kept up the conversation, utterly regardless of all the frantic endeavours on the part of his brother, while I, of course, saw it was not my place to interfere.

We had not been seated very long, however, when our host put his head in at the door to remind his slothful guests (among whom I fear I was to be numbered) that it was already past ten and that we had a five miles ride that morning to the meet.

It so chanced that I did not come across either of the two princes again that day. In fact, it was not until after dinner on the following night that I had another word with the Prince Frederick, who interested me so greatly.

I chanced to find my way out on to the terrace which ran along the front of the dining room windows, and here I discovered the Prince groping about on the ground.

As I approached he looked up, "Oh," he said, "I have dropped my eye, could you help me find it?"

"Your eye!" I exclaimed in wonder.

However, he soon set me at rest by explaining that it was a glass one.

We searched a long time, and presently I came across it, half hidden beneath a big lump of gravel.

As he replaced the missing member, I inwardly made a note of the peculiarity, which I felt would enable me in future to tell the two brothers apart without the smallest difficulty. The only thing that surprised me was that no one had ever discovered the defect before.

Presently, however, this was explained, for as we were sitting together in the billiard-room that evening Prince Frederick informed me that the eye had been made especially for him, and at a great cost, by an oculist who deservedly had the reputation of being at the head of his profession. This was sufficient reason why it should be so unnoticeable until the imitation was pointed out.

The next day I found myself called back to town unexpectedly, but before I left I received and accepted an invitation to pay this young prince a visit in his new home as soon as I could see my way to journeying to such distant parts.

I also received at his hands a letter of recommendation to the great Parisian specialist who had made that wonderful imitation eye, in case, as he put it, "I should ever want one for myself."

This story is not an autobiography, and I have therefore purposely made as few remarks about myself as possible. However, I must explain one or two personal matters before proceeding with my tale.

It must be known then, that I was the nephew of Sir Francis Gubyon. Further, that the knight had a daughter. Now, although no words had ever been spoken on the matter on either side, it seemed, somehow, the accepted arrangement that some day we should be more than cousins to one another. I came, therefore, apparently without justification, to look upon my Cousin Grace as my special property.

Imagine my surprise and disgust, therefore, when one morning, some two years after the events I have nar-

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rated, I received a short note from my uncle, which ran as follows:

My Dear Boy,—I am sure you will hear with great pleasure of the engagement and approaching marriage of Gracie. The whole affair has been arranged very suddenly. No doubt you noticed when staying here some two years ago that Gracie showed a great liking for Prince Frederick Brahbee, who was spending some time with me before going out to his newly accquired estates. Also you may have perceived that the feeling was not reciprocated. However, the young man seems to have altered his mind since then, as he turned up in England a few days ago, and has asked for the hand of my daughter in marriage, and of course Gracie was delighted. The event is to come off at once, as he has to return again to India shortly. You will, of course, give us the pleasure of your presence at the ceremony the day after to-morrow.

Yours, etc.

I read the letter several times, and each time I felt the blow more keenly. It was terrible news to me. After all, Gracie never cared for me—or only as a cousin. I hated myself for waiting so long. I abused myself for not having noticed that there was something between my fickle cousin and the prince. My head sank on my hands, and I believe I cried.

Of course, I realised that it was no earthly use grieving. It was too late to declare my affections now.

Finally I determined to face the whole thing boldly, and to accept the invitation to be present at the wedding.

Well, it so happened that I was detained in town and only found myself in the train two hours before the ceremony was to take place.

When I arrived at the station I found the dog-cart waiting. There was then only ten minutes to spare, and a good two miles between me and the church.

The horse did his best, but luck was against me. Half way there we were blocked for a good five minutes by a waggon, and when at last I alighted at the porch the service had already begun.

I entered the church and was shown into a seat which had been kept for me right in the front.

Who can describe my emotions as I sat there to see the girl I loved married to another.

When at last I dragged my eyes from the lovely face of the bride I felt a fainting sensation come over me. However, with a supreme effort, I righted myself, and took a glance of no little curiosity at the prince who had thus forestalled me in my love.

I started as I looked upon his face. To the eye of the casual observer Prince Frederick had not altered. But his face! To the reader of characters what a history had been engraved there in the course of two short years. That look of gentleness and trustfulness had disappeared. The troubles of wealth had told upon this young man's whole being. His face showed signs of fearful dissipation, and his eyes seemed to look upon everything with a distrustful glare. I sighed for the sweet innocent girl who was to share her life with him.

As the pair stood before the minister to be made one, Prince Frederick, as if conscious of the gaze I had fixed upon him, turned round and his eyes met mine. For a moment we faced one another. Suddenly I felt myself turn cold all over and I clutched at the pew for support. Then with a wild cry I sprang from my place and leapt towards the pair.

The eyes that were turned upon me were both as Nature made them.

"Where is your brother?" I cried, as I seized the startled bridegroom by the arm. Then turning to the excited congregation I, horror-stricken, said:

"This man is not Prince Frederick, but his younger brother."

* * * * *

I had made the discovery only just in time to save the two being wedded.

I will not dwell on those dreadful moments when there, before my startled friends, I proved my statement. I will not describe the scene of confusion which followed as my cousin was carried to the carriage fainting, nor as the prince left the church, not a husband, but a prisoner.

It was a long time before the affair was cleared up in the way which led to the sad execution of the young Prince Victor Brahbee which has, as you know, just taken place.

The papers the impostor had with him showed the fact that he was known in India as Prince Frederick Brahbee, and we learnt by wire that no brother had ever arrived with him at the huge estates which were supposed to be his.

However, the evidence of the Parisian specialist, whose address I had received from the missing Prince's hands, was sufficient to amply prove my assertions.

Finally, the mystery was cleared up, as no doubt you have read, by the discovery of human remains beneath the floor of a room in a hotel. This was at Bombay, where it was proved the two princes, Frederick Brahbee and Victor Brahbee had stayed. Among the dust and bones was found a glass eye of exquisite make which the specialist had no difficulty in identifying.

The hotel keeper, on being closely questioned, stated that he was aware of the fact that only one of the gentlemen had ever left the hotel.

The other, he had been told, had been drowned accidentally one day during his stay, but he had received a large sum to say nothing about the affair. It was none of his business, and he had held his tongue.

And this is the true history of the One-Eyed Prince.

F. L. P.

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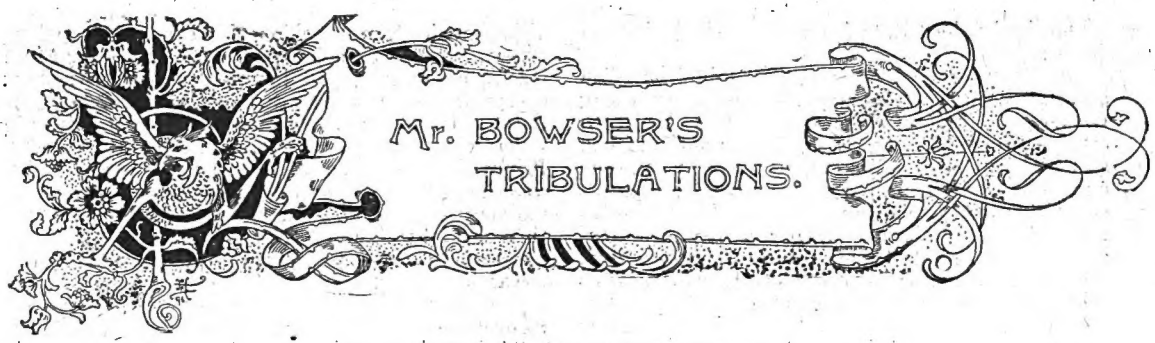

He Is Called upon to Settle a Dispute.

THE Bowsers had just finished dinner the other evening when the bell rang, and Mr. Bowser was asked to step outside for a minute. He held some sort of discussion with two or three men on the doorstep, and at the end of ten minutes re-entered the house to say to Mrs. Bowser:

"I find that I shall have to go out for an hour or so this evening."

"Some club matter?" she queried.

"No. Those gentlemen who just called were a committee, or rather, two committees, appointed to secure my services as arbitrator between two unions. I am to meet them at head-quarters. I was selected over scores of others mentioned, and I feel a bit proud of the honour done me."

"But what do you want to mix up in a quarrel for?" she asked.

"In the first place there is no quarrel, but only a disagreement; in the next, I shall hear the statements of both sides and smooth over the little trouble."

"What is it about?"

"Why, as I understand it, the Moving Van Union and the Moving Van Employers are at loggerheads as to what constitutes a load for a man to carry up three flights of stairs. The Union holds to it that when a man is loaded down with a sideboard or a bureau that's enough, while the Employers hold that a mattress or an iron bedstead ought to be added. I shall, of course, hear more particulars at headquarters. It has been agreed to leave the decision to me, and I feel somewhat flattered over it."

"I wouldn't if I were you," quietly observed Mrs. Bowser.

"Hey? What do you mean?"

"I mean that you had better let them fight it out among themselves. You'll make more enemies than friends if you join in."

"There you go—always and forever opposing anything I do. I might have known you'd have something to say against it. Woman, what in thunder ails you?"

"I simply ask you to keep out of trouble. What is it to you whether a moving van man carries six bedsteads or only a hat-box at a load?"

"Do you understand that this matter may become a great national issue within a month?" he asked preening himself.

"No, I don't."

"Do you understand that it may eventually spread to the remotest parts of the earth, and that thrones may totter and republics quake under the strain?"

"Nonsense. I understand that if you mix yourself up with it you'll come home hatless and with your coat torn up the back."

"That is enough, woman—that is enough," said Mr. Bowser as he waved her aside. "You have got about as much sense as a bump on a log, and it is of no use to argue with you. Don't sit up for me. I shall come home when I am ready. What the blazes——"

He referred to the cat, which was sitting up and grinning at him with her left eye half closed. He jumped at her with fell intention, but she sought safety under the piano and chuckled as he put on his overcoat and hat and passed out of the house.

After a walk of ten minutes he reached the place designated. It was a carriage warehouse. It was next door to a public-house. There were two men in the carriage warehouse and thirty-four in the public-house, and, as the thirty-four refused to join the two, the two finally decided to join the thirty-four.

Mr. Bowser didn't look upon this as exactly parliamentary, but he was not there to split straws. He was expected. He was greeted as "old man," "boss," "Bowser," and so forth, and the president of the Moving Van Union took him aside and said:

"I say, you'd better treat the boys to drinks all round before we begin business. They have done you a great honour, and they'll want to see that you appreciate it."

Mr. Bowser hesitated, but only for a moment. It was a crisis, and he never shirked a crisis. The thirty-seven glasses had scarcely been emptied when the president of the Moving Van Employers beckoned him into a corner and whispered:

"Repeat the dose, old man. That was a treat for the Union. You must now treat the Employers."

Mr. Bowser treated. It was another crisis, and he met it. Then the meeting was called to order, and the president of the M. V. E. proceeded to state his side of the case.

When he hired a man on one of his carts, he expected that man to do his duty. If that man was broad enough in the back and strong enough in the legs to carry a piano upstairs, he was expected to do it. If he was a weakling and could only bear the weight of a cabinet and a bookcase, no fault would be found with him so long as he did his best. What the Employers found fault with was that two men would conspire to do one man's work.

He cited case after case where he had seen men climb three or four flights of stairs with no other loads than a stove on their backs and a dining-room table in either hand, and where he had seen two men make a great ado about getting a safe weighing half a ton on to a fourth floor.

All the Employers asked for was a square deal. They didn't expect any one man to carry a whole vanload of goods upstairs at one trip, but neither was it fair or right that a man should waste valuable minutes mopping the sweat from his brow or wondering how a six-foot bedstead could be pushed up a three-foot stairway.

The speaker did not sit down when he had finished. On the contrary, he edged near to Mr. Bowser and suggested that another crisis was at hand. That crisis called for more beer, and Mr. Bowser met it.

Then the president of the M. V. U. rose and stated his side of the case. He didn't call it a case where capital was sucking the lifeblood of labour. It was that capital was breaking labour's back by overloading it with sideboards and cabinets. He pointed to his bald head and declared that his hair had been worn off by rubbing against family linen chests.

He pointed to his bowlegs and declared them to be the direct result of carrying heavy loads of bedsteads and tables. Under

the slave-driving system pursued by the M. V. E., the members of the M. V.. U. all over the world were becoming squat, baldheaded and bowlegged, and a year hence would see them hump-backed as well. It was a feeling speech—that is, he felt for Mr. Bowser after concluding it, and said that a terrible crisis could only be avoided by another call for beer. It was called for.

Then the arbitrator rose to arbitrate. Mr. Bowser will never remember where he began his remarks; anyhow, they were interrupted by calls for more beer. He will also be at a loss to recall just what started the disturbance when further calls for beer were unheeded. Someone may have called someone else a prevaricator, or there may have been a difference of opinion on some of the political questions of the day. A disturbance came, however, and two minutes after the first upset everybody was trying to punch everybody else's head.

There was no opportunity for Mr. Bowser to bear himself nobly in this crisis. A blow on the nose put him out of it almost at the start, and he had been walked on for ten minutes before he finally reached the door and got out. Mrs. Bowser and the cat were waiting.

The silence of the frosty evening was suddenly broken by what seemed to be the gallop of a horse along the footpath. It came nearer and nearer, and there was a hitch and a limp in the gallop as it turned in at the gate. Then there was a rush up the front step, a bang at the door, and Mr. Bowser stood in the hall. He was a human wreck. He had got it badly. He had met the enemy, and been worsted.

"Well?" asked Mrs. Bowser as he leant up against the wall and panted.

His eyes rolled, but he could not utter a word.

"I see," she continued. "Arbitrator Bowser has arbitrated and the result is what might be expected—nose smashed, hat gone, clothes ruined, and your eyes turning black. If you can manage to crawl upstairs, I'll get some hot water and the medicine chest and see if I can patch you up."

"Wo—woman——" he began, but she raised her hand and stopped him, and he crawled.

M. Quad.

[Next week: The effect a summer drink like his mother used to make, had on him.]

A QUEER BLUNDER.

How a Bride was Won by a Mistake.

The morning sun brightened the gilt letters on the sign above the entrance to the staunch old warehouse, but its radiance was lost on the young man with keen, grey eyes who stood at the office door and hesitated before he turned the knob. In that brief moment he tried to recall the directions that Emily Quarles had given him,

"Father is peculiar," she had said. "You must know him before you can appreciate him." And Spencer Grant wondered how long it would be before this appreciative stage could be reached. He hadn't met this peculiar father, and here he was standing on the doormat of his office mustering up courage to go in and ask him for his daughter.

What else had Emily said? "Do not contradict father. Do just what he tells you to do. Let him have his own way. If he blusters and fumes, wait quietly. He will soon cool down. Father's gruff manner is largely assumed. If you have tact, you will discover the way to handle him. Tell him truthfully, if you have a chance, how we met at Aunt Stanhope's, and that as soon as we were quite assured that we were all in all to each other, which, you must add, came to both of us as a complete surprise, I sent you directly to him. I will prepare him as far as I think judicious for your coming. Keep a stout heart and guard your temper."

Spencer turned the knob and went in. There were several clerks writing in the outer office, but they did not look up as he passed along the narrow space before the high railing to the door marked "private." He knocked at this door, and a gruff voice bade him come in. Spencer summoned up all his resolution and entered

A sharp-featured old man, with heavy eyebrows, was seated at a desk, with his bushy grey head bent above a handful of papers.

"Sit down," he said, without looking up.

Spencer obeyed, and after a little the old man raised his head, glanced at the clock, and then gave the young man a long searching glance. As he did so he drew a letter towards him and glanced at a page of it. Again he stared at Spencer.

"Well," he said abruptly, "you are exactly to time. You were to be here precisely at ten. This argues well for your early training. You have made a good impression on me to start with."

Spencer murmured his pleasure at this favourable comment, but the old man interrupted him.

"Your father says here that you resemble him. He writes that the resemblance is so strong that I couldn't help but know who you were if I chanced to meet you anywhere. I don't agree with him, though there is a family resemblance. You are much better looking than he ever dreamt of being."

"Did my father say that?" inquired Spencer hastily. He knew the thing was quite impossible. Emily's father was labouring under some queer delusion. But he didn't mean to contradict him.

"Yes, he did," chuckled the old man, with a grim smile. "Fathers with but one child are apt to be asses." Then his tone changed. "What can you do? Can you write shorthand? Do you understand typewriting? Can you compose a good letter? Can you spell?"

"I think," said Spencer, quietly, "that I can best answer that by saying that I have a pretty thorough business training that was picked up in four years of practical work. I've been hard at it, in fact, ever since I left school."

"Your father doesn't make any such claim," said the old man, referring again to the letter. "All he says is 'Try him.' I will. I've made a good place for you. I am going to indulge in the luxury of a private secretary. Ha, ha, ha! Here take these letters. See what answers they need. Answer 'em. That's your little side room there. Leave the door open—I may want to call you."

Spencer smilingly took the letters and without a trace of hesitation went into the little room assigned him. He found the conveniences he needed, and with his amused smile deepening he went at his task.

Presently he heard the outer door of the office open and shut, and a moment later the following dialogue came to him through the half-closed door:

"So you have come," growled the old man.

"Yes, sir," said a mild voice with a little quaver in it.

"Well," said the old man, with a dangerous rising inflection, "I want to tell you that it can never be!"

"Do you mean that I won't do?" inquired the mild voice.

"That's just what I mean," snarled the old man. "Your comprehension does you credit."

"But how can you tell till you've tried me?" protested the mild voice.

"Tried you?" roared the old man. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, sir," said the mild voice, hurriedly, "that I hardly think it fair to condemn me unheard and untried. I was led to think you would show me more consideration."

"Oh, you were, were you?" snapped the old man. "Well, sir, you have been falsely led. I know my daughter much better than you do, sir!"

"Your daughter, sir?"

"Yes, my daughter! And don't you dare to mention her name!"

"I—I had no intention of doing so, sir."

"Eh? Coming to your senses, are you? That's right. She's only a foolish, headstrong girl. In a month she'll forget your existence."

"But I don't see what your daughter has to do with it. She is nothing to me, sir."

"Spoken like a sensible youth. I thought I'd convince you. There, there, let the whole thing drop."

"And you positively refuse to give me a trial?"

"Confound you, there you go again! Do you take me for an idiot!"

"I—I wouldn't go as far as that, sir. You don't seem to understand that I was led to believe you would give me an opportunity to show my worth. I am greatly disappointed, sir."

"Heavens! man, are we going over all that again?"

"Try me for a month, sir."

"Not for a minute!"

"For a week."

"Leave the room, sir! Go, sir! Go to the lunatic asylum and marry somebody in your own mental class."

"I am going, sir. My father will be greatly surprised at your unreasonable treatment."

"Your father! Who cares for your father? Why doesn't he keep his weak-minded children at home?"

"Good day, sir."

The door closed with a sharp bang, and there was a brief silence.

"I wonder what the dickens he meant by saying he'd tell his father?" Spencer heard the old man mutter. "Who's his father? Well, whoever he is, his son shall never marry my daughter. What in the world could she have seen in such an unbalanced fellow?"

His heavy step sounded on the floor, and when Spencer looked up the old man was gazing down at him from the doorway. His face was very red and his white hair bristled with indignation.

"Well, Mr. Secretary," he said, "how are we coming on?"

"Very well, sir," replied Spencer, "I'll lay these replies upon your desk in a few moments."

"Good," said the old man.

"By the way," said Spencer, "what do you want to say to Van Annam and Co.? They make an offer for your stock of cochineal, you know."

"Accept it and tell them we'll ship the stuff to-morrow."

"I wouldn't do that," said the secretary.

"Eh?" cried the astonished old man.

"You don't seem to know that there is a corner forming in dye stuffs," said Spencer, with a slight smile. "Wait a minute, and I will telephone for the latest quotations."

He rose as he spoke and stepped into the outer office and entered the telephone box.

"It is just as I supposed," he said as he rejoined the old man. "Cochineal jumped 34 per cent. at the opening of the market this morning."

The old man turned and went back to his desk. A moment later he looked in again.

"That means £500 to the good," he said. "I fancy you'll earn your salary all right." Then he slowly added, "And I fancy I'm getting old."

The sound of an opening door drew his attention. A radiant vision appeared in the doorway. It was Emily.

"Well, papa?" she cried, as she stepped forward.

The old man's lips tightened. "I sent him packing," he said rapidly. "A most reprehensible young follow. You didn't know him, my dear."

Before she could indignantly reply an astonishing apparition appeared in the doorway of the inner room. It was Spencer—it was Spencer, bare-headed, with a pen in one hand and a bundle of letters in the others. As he caught her eye he put his finger to his lips, and shook his head at her over the old man's shoulder, and drew back.

"Oh, father," was all Emily could say.

"Don't feel bad, my child," said the old man, with a little tenderness in his tone. "You'll soon forget him." He lowered his voice. "I've got a nice young fellow inside there"—he jerked his thumb towards the inner door—"who is just the man for you. Smart, splendid family, good looking, bright as a new pin. Saved me £500 this very morning! Hadn't been at work twenty minutes. Wait a little and I'll introduce him."

"Let me look at him!" cried Emily, as she darted to the door.

"Good morning," she said to Spencer.

"Good morning," answered that smiling youth, with an eloquent grimace.

Emily turned to her astonished parent.

"He'll do," she said. "Come out here, sir," and they came forward hand in hand.

"Bless my soul!" cried the paralysed father.

"You are quite right, papa," said Emily. "He is just the man for me. In fact, I've thought so for some time, and yet I don't believe you really know who he is. You are getting reckless, daddy. Tell him who you are, Spencer."

"I am Spencer Grant, of Spencer Grant and Co., importers of dyestuffs and druggists' supplies, and entirely at Mr. Richard Quarles' service."

"Spencer Grant and Co.!" gasped the old man, as a look of horror came over his face. "Then who was the other fellow?"

"I'm afraid," said Spencer gently, "that it was the highly recommended son of your old friend."

"Awful!" groaned the old man. "I was right when I said fathers with one child are asses. How can I explain?"

"Suppose you leave the explanation to your new secretary?" said Emily.

"Let me suggest," said Spencer, with a happy smile, "that you leave it to the junior member of the new firm of Quarles and Grant."

And then the grim old man chuckled. N. S. T.

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SHORT STORIES
NAME HUNTING COMPETITION.

NAMES OF BRITISH AND IRISH TOWNS.

First Prize - - £10. Second Prize - - £2.
Third to Sixth Prizes - - £1 each.

ALL COUPONS APPEAR IN SHORT STORIES.

Below will be found ten sets of words, each set describing the name of a town of over 5,000 inhabitants in the United Kingdom.

Write down in the spaces provided the names of all those places you can discover. If you can't find all, put down as many as you can.

For the convenience of those readers who were unable to obtain copies of the numbers of "SHORT STORIES" containing the first two coupons, it has been arranged to publish them in "THE BIG BUDGET," dated April 12th; on sale Thursday next.

Note These Facts. . .

1. Names must be written in ink.
2. Only one name is allowed against each set of words.
3. When you have filled up your list, cut it out and keep it by you until another list has appeared.
4. You may send in as many sets of lists as you like, but each set will be accepted independently, and must be pinned together.
5. In the event of the prize being divided, only one share will go to each successful competitor, no matter how many duplicate attempts he may send in.
6. No competitor may receive the assistance of professional competition solvers whose advertisements appear in the Press. Every person who enters for this competition must do so only on this understanding, and those selected as winners may be asked to satisfy us that they have not contravened this condition.

The first prize of £10 will be given to the reader from whom we receive coupons containing the greatest number of correct solutions. The second prize will be given to the sender of the next most nearly correct solutions, and so on. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor, whose decision is final.

THIRD LIST. Cut to edge—>

Example:

To exclude monarch..... Barking.

21. City of the King's Consort ..... 21 .....
22. A vessel for bathing in ..... 22 .....
23. Sea weed ..... 23 .....
24. Interrupt a way ..... 24 .....
25. Border of an organ in the animal system ..... 25 .....
26. An ornament; stone ..... 26 .....
27. Genuine ..... 27 .....
28. The bleak finished ..... 28 .....
29. Grey; to cover with earth ..... 29 .....
30. A plant with emollient qualities 30 .....

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Cut to edge—>

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Being Leaves from the Life-Book of Mrs. Dundas Muir.

CHAPTER I.

The Week-End and the Widow.

"Muir? Dundas Muir? Don't know her."

"No! Why, I thought everybody who is anybody knew the very loveliest widow man ever left behind him."

"Well, you see I most certainly am not everybody; for, as a matter of fact, the lady is as altogether unknown to me as—as is the Queen of Sheba."

"You surprise me, Fielding," said the master of "Upcotes," Jack Wyndham—known in his service days as "Daredevil Jack"—with a semi-comic shrug of one shoulder. "You—a man who goes everywhere, sees everything, and who is credited with knowing everybody worth knowing—not, at some time during your wanderings, to have crossed the trail of the divine widow! It is inconceivable!"

"But yet true," returned Vivian Fielding, puffing vigorously the while at his cigar. "Now, tell me, old chap, what is she like, this paragon of perfection?—and—whence comes she?"

"Like!" replied the host. "Why, like nothing else under the sun! Certainly like no other woman."

"A large order that, my enthusiastic friend! As how? Consider!—explain!"

"She's an enigma. She is full of ideas; her lips literally drop pearls of wit and wisdom; and yet she can hardly be said to be—well—you know—educated—in the academic sense, that is, and as you and I understand it!"

"Odd that. Yes?"

"Then, my boy, she's beautiful! You can't conceive how beautiful. There must, I am convinced, be a strain of French blood in her; she is so *chic*; so brimming over with Gallic innocence and charm."

"Ah! And her late husband—who was he?—what was he?"

"That's the riddle! Nobody knows. I rather think he must have been some beastly rich Yankee Johnny, for I *do* know that she has lived in New York and Boston; while more than once she has been heard to drop suspicious allusions to a certain General Lew Cole, whoever he may have been."

"Odd," remarked Fielding again. "And you've invited this mysterious being to join our week-end party? Rather risky, isn't it, supposing that there *should* be anything about her not quite—you understand?"

"I invited her! No, that's the funny part of it, and what I just did *not* do! She invited herself, or rather persuaded Mrs. Cottrell—you know Mrs. Cottrell?—her husband is M.P. for this division of the county—persuaded me to include her in her family contribution to my guest list."

"Well, all I can say is," said Vivian Fielding rising, and stretching himself, "that she is undoubtedly a clever woman; but that she is as straight as she is clever is, I am inclined to fancy, decidedly open to question."

The two men were old Army comrades and friends. Both were comparatively young, neither being much over thirty-two or three.

Wyndham was a rich man, and "Upcotes," his river place beyond Cookham, would have been hard to beat as a near-to-London country seat.

This after-dinner talk on the Friday evening before Mrs. Dundas Muir's expected week-end advent on the day following, made Fielding especially arm himself as against an enemy who would, he more than shrewdly suspected, prove to be worthy of his steel.

A travelled man, there was hardly a habitable hole and corner of the earth that, at some time or other, he had not visited. Woman, as such, he had more particularly studied; but it was with the object of picking out her faults and failings, rather than to do honour to her possible gifts and virtues.

Rumour had it that Vivian Fielding had, in his earlier days, suffered at the hands of an unscrupulous Circe, and for once rumour was right.

While in Washington, during a long leave, some six years before, he had attended White House and other Ministerial receptions. At one of the latter, at the residence of the then War Secretary, he had been introduced to a lady whose fascinating personality was destined to influence him so powerfully as to make of him her most abject slave and worshipper.

Vashti Endicott had really no right or title to an entrance into the smart political set of the capital. Her origin, position, and social standing were absolutely unknown; but she appeared to have good means; and this, and her almost perfect loveliness—of a rich Spanish type—sufficed to blind people—the men especially—to the fact that she was altogether silent as to her life details.

Fielding met Vashti Endicott time and again, the last time being at the same house where he had been first introduced to her.

It was pure accident that made it the last time; pure accident that wrought a change in the man's nature that, in the years that followed, generated in his soul a veritable hatred of all women.

The occasion was a Ministerial reception, and Vashti was late.

Never at any time particularly keen upon social functions

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of this kind, and, it must be confessed, not a little disappointed at the tarrying of his idol, Fielding, about midnight, wandered aimlessly into the heavy scent-laden air of the winter-garden.

Lighting a cigarette, he seated himself in a comfortable bamboo reclining chair, and fell into a dreamy muse.

A voice, a woman's voice, close behind him—not loud, but distinct, clear, unmistakable—smote on his ear with the force and snap of a pistol-shot.

"I tell you," it said, and there was a ring of triumphant wickedness in the tone of it, "the man is a fool! To-morrow he will speak, and then—then, when, in a few months, I have shaken myself free of him, you and I will reap the reward; for I, my dear, will marry you the very next day."

"It sounds all very pretty," said a man's voice, in deep, guttural tones, "but how if he does *not* come up to the scratch—how then?"

"But he will, my friend! He will, for I have him wound round my little finger."

"Oh, I know your tricks and wiles, Vashti, and it makes me hot and murderous when I see you exercising them upon another man. Still, there *may* be a slip; nothing is sure in this world, sweetheart!"

"Again, I tell you this thing is as sure—as death. Leave me now, and mix among the crowd in the reception room. He does not yet know that I am here. I go now to seek him. Leave me, I say, it would be fatal to our plans were he, by any chance, to find us here!"

"Pardon me, madam!" and the tall soldierly figure rose slowly from the chair behind the group of palms, towering magnificently above the pair of self-confessed plotters. "Pardon me, but I would beg of you to spare yourself the trouble of—of seeking me out. This—this gentleman will also, I am sure, rejoice in the fact that there need be no delay, even of a few months, in the completion of his happiness. I have the honour of wishing you, Miss Endicott, and you, sir, a very good evening."

Captain Lew Cole, U.S.A., made a movement to stay the young Englishman; but in obedience to a warning hand-pressure on his arm, thought better of it, and merely bowed in sulky response to Vivian Fielding's somewhat contemptuous parting salutation.

The latter was ignorant of his unprincipled rival's name; indeed, never came to know it until years afterwards, when the episode was finally closed.

Vashti Endicott from that evening disappeared from Washington, the Potomac Rangers in like manner suddenly lacking a captain.

Subsequently, however, an American friend of Fielding's told him of having seen the lady driving in Hyde Park, London, in fashionable guise. Unfortunately, the opportunity for either Fielding or his friend to confirm this never came, Vashti Endicott (if she it were), as if conscious of observation, and not desiring it, vanishing into space again.

It was then, with the memory of this past experience strong upon him, that Vivian Fielding awaited the arrival at Wyndham's house of the mysterious Mrs. Dundas Muir.

But it was fated not to be—yet.

Early on Saturday morning, at the breakfast-table, Wyndham received a wire.

"Hallo!" he cried. "Here's a bit of a disappointment, old chap! The widow isn't coming after all — can't come. Has gone, in fact, to Paris on important and urgent business."

"Yes, I am disappointed," said the other quietly, "in a way."

"I wrote yesterday to Mrs. Cottrell," Wyndham went on, "and told her that Mr. Vivian Fielding, M.T.C., the celebrated explorer and big game sportsman, was here."

"You did!" cried Fielding quickly. "Then—then I am not surprised that 'The Lady from London'—the charming widow, Mrs. Dundas Muir, has suddenly found it necessary to visit Paris at this particular moment, instead of honouring 'Upcotes' with her presence to-day."

"Surprised! But why?"

"I would rather not explain—yet. I can only say that all things considered, it is a very remarkable coincidence."

CHAPTER II.

The Fitting-in of the Puzzle.

Vivian Fielding was up in town, staying for a few days with his married sister, Lady Pierpoint.

He had been induced to come, at his sister's pleading, but sorely against his inclination, to take part in a big society function, nothing less than a gorgeous fancy-dress ball at the Grafton Galleries.

On the morning of the event, Fielding at luncheon asked his sister if she knew anything of a Mrs. Dundas Muir, a young and beautiful widow.

Lady Pierpoint was in the act of replying in the negative when Jack Wyndham was announced.

"Good Heavens! What's the trouble, man?" cried Fielding. "You look as if that worm Hamlet talks about had got a good grip of your damasked cheek. But, seriously, old fellow, what's the matter?"

"Fielding, you remember that Mrs. Dundas Muir, the widow—'The Lady from London' as you styled her?"

"Yes! I remember. Well, what of her?"

He asked the question with a certain amount of eagerness, as if suddenly aroused to an interest in the subject of it.

"This; you know Kemble—Scots Guards Kemble—I met him an hour ago at the club, where I dropped in on my way from Waterloo to your place here."

"Yes; but what's that to do with the fair widow?"

"Much, if what Kemble says be true; and I've no reason for believing it to be otherwise."

"This is interesting, Jack—go on. But, half a moment! Evelyn, just leave us alone, there's a good girl, for half-an-hour."

He made the request of his sister in a peculiarly masterful way; more as if he expected her to do as he wished without let or demur.

"Now, Jack!" he resumed quietly, when they were alone.

"Well, Harry Kemble, whose father is, you know, chairman of the Metropolitan Banking Company, says that the bank where Mrs. Dundas Muir opened an account last month has, within the past week, had presented over its counter cheques of hers, through leading London tradesmen and others, to an amount running into five figures."

"More interesting still! Well?"

"A certain young ass in Kemble's own regiment, Lord Westfield's son—you remember him, young Archie Brent—has this morning in person, not only made good the lady's overdraw, but has actually paid in to Mrs. Muir's account a sum of twenty thousand pounds."

"That's enough, Jack! I've heard of young Brent's infatuation for someone concerning whom little or nothing was known, and that he was actually on the eve of marriage with the lady. Now, do you know where young Brent can be found?"

"No, I don't, but Kemble dropped that the Hon. Archie and himself were to put in an appearance at the Grafton Galleries ball to-night."

"That will do. Say nothing to anybody, Jack. Don't whisper to your shadow, even; and if you're very keen-eyed and watchful I think I can promise you that you will see to-night the playing out of a little drama that will amply reward your pains."

"Well! I am all in the dark. You seem to know more than I do."

"Do I? Perhaps I do. Now listen. What do you say young Brent is going as—a Pierrot?"

"So Kemble says."

"Any distinguishing mark that you know of?"

"His costume, Kemble says, will be of white satin, his vizard red."

"It is as though you were aware that I should want to know this. Either that, or that Fate is unusually kind."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I should have been ignorant of it, only that the question of fancy dress incidentally came up, and Kemble instanced Brent's dress as something out of the ordinary."

"The fact that it is so will probably save that foolishly erratic young gentleman from committing himself to a course that would assuredly lead to his undoing."

"You say so; and therefore I suppose that it is so; but for the life of me I can see no link between you and these people, or understand why you are so concerned to play *deus ex machina* in the drama you speak of."

"No? Don't try to understand, or to see, old fellow—yet! Take my word for it, things will pan out much as I prophecy they will, so that when the curtain falls, everybody—including yours truly—but excepting one or two of the principals—will, I fancy, be perfectly satisfied with the ending of the piece, which will be in the good old fashion of virtue rewarded and vice punished."

CHAPTER III.

The Fancy Dress Ball at the Grafton Galleries.

The rooms were crowded.

From theatre and dinner-party, from social entertainments innumerable, came shoals of people, many of them possessors of historic names and of names to conjure with. As for beauty, it had all its own way that night.

Wyndham, who had arrived about half-past eleven, with Lady Pierpoint's party, looked about in every direction for his friend, but Fielding was invisible.

The satin-robed Pierrot was there, and curiously quiet for one of his character.

Just after the stroke of twelve, a figure wrapped from head to foot in a scarlet domino approached the Pierrot and whispered in his ear.

The effect was electrical.

"In the room beyond? And—and as Luna, did you say?"

"Yes, but do not speak so loud. You are to come to her in a quarter of an hour from now. She will then be ready to leave. Everything is arranged; the carriage, the tickets for Paris. In a quarter of an hour."

Pierrot was now all excitement. He acted in a most ridiculous fashion. Leaping, curvetting, mopping and mowing, he soon became the observed of all.

Bye-and-bye he had contrived to antic his way to the spot in the further room indicated by the red domino.

Surely enough, a lady attired as Luna, in clinging folds of black material, with silver crescents wrought upon it, and with a big diamond crescent in her hair, was standing as if in expectation, watching the door of communication.

Near by her was red a domino, with an immense fur cloak over one arm.

There was only a step between the two figures and a door leading into a long passage that gave on to the entrance-hall.

The Pierrot approached Luna.

"I am ready," he whispered, the perspiration streaming down his face from his recent exertions. "My man has arranged for me to change *en route*; so that Dover reached no one will be the wiser."

"My maid Felice, will do the same for me."

"Now," interrupted red domino, "it is time."

As he spoke, he led Luna through the door, signing to Pierrot to follow. Then he enveloped the lady in the fur cloak, which completely enshrouded her.

Pierrot was about to take a long travelling coat with a hood from a young fellow in groom's livery, who stepped forward with it in his hand, as the party of three made to descend the steps of the building to the street, where a brougham and pair was waiting to take up.

At that moment a gentleman in evening dress hurriedly passed out after them, and on the kerb laid his hand on Luna's arm.

"Forgive me, Miss Endicott, otherwise Mrs. Dundas Muir, but I am afraid that you will be unable to avail yourself of your ticket for Paris; that you must, for awhile, at least, postpone your journey."

The woman shivered perceptibly, and cowered against the side of the carriage.

Pierrot's bewilderment was pitiably absurd.

"Who are you, sir?" he stammered to Fielding, "and what right have you to interfere with my—with this lady's business?"

"Don't be a fool, Brent!" whispered the other. "Come out of this to my rooms, and I will convince you that I am swayed by the best of motives as towards yourself."

Meanwhile, Lew Cole, the man in the red domino, slipped through the crowd of waiting vehicles, and was seen no more, his companion being permitted at last to drive away.

Fielding's last words to the latter were that he would have her every movement watched until she was out of the country.

In the small hours of the next morning, young Brent told Fielding the story of his almost criminal foolishness.

It appeared that the young Guardsman regarded ex-Captain Lew Cole as Vashti's brother; and that the precious pair's idea must have been by the flight to Paris—where, having got from their dupe all the loot possible, they would undoubtedly have left him—to compromise Archie Brent in the eyes alike of Society and of his friends.

Vivian Fielding says to-day that, but for the desire to save young Brent from the wiles of the woman who had in the past worked her wicked will upon himself, he would have repented of his revenge, and have let the principal sinner alone.

As it was, beyond foiling her plan with regard to Lord Westfield's son and heir, Fielding's action had no punitive result.

Brent's money (irrevocably gone) saved the woman and her American husband from a serious danger in connection with the bank. There was a doubt as to whether the pair could not have been proceeded against for conspiracy, but it was decided to let the matter drop, on the condition that they should leave the metropolis and the kingdom for over sea, which, under the supervision of Scotland Yard, they did forthwith.

Nothing definite has since been heard of Vashti Endicott—or Cole—though Vivian Fielding is half inclined to recognise in the chief female character in a recent New York criminal trial, the lovely, but altogether impossible "Lady from London."

Ralph Enderby.

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By "AUSTRALIS."

The father rested his hand on her head, caressing the glossy hair.

CHAPTER I.
The Address.

THE guests were all departing, and soon the large rooms of "Eagle's Nest" would be empty again. At the window, carelessly watching the stream of carriages bearing away the numerous acquaintances who had been at her birthday party, stood a young girl, caressing the rough head of a thoroughbred little terrier, whose name—"Vedo"—sparkled in precious stones on a noticeably handsome golden collar. The last carriage had not yet started, when a gentleman entered the room as if in search of someone. On seeing the graceful figure at the window he hastily approached, and, laying his hand gently on her round white arm, he exclaimed:

"My answer, Myowne! Ah, give me hope; only a little hope—say yes."

With a crimson flush mounting to her proud young face she turned and raised her eyes to his; there was something like a smile playing round the rosy lips as she spoke: "But do you really love me?"

"Have I not told you so? Shall I swear it by all I hold most dear—your own sweet self?"

"No, Mr. Elliot, swear not at all, but think how unsuited I am to be your wife. Our ideas are not in common; your life is different from mine. Let us remain friends."

"Friends!" exclaimed her companion, while a strange light flashed in his grey eyes. "You and I cannot be friends. Explain yourself—you owe it to my love. Why can you not be my wife?"

Myowne bent her head and caressed the little dog in her arms. After a moment's thought she looked up, and her voice trembled as she answered: "You have done me the honour to offer me your hand——"

"Say my love, for they both go together!" exclaimed the man, looking eagerly into the bright face beside him.

What her answer would have been cannot be told, for at that moment a young man entered the room, and, seeing the pair near the window, respectfully approached.

"Pardon my intrusion, Miss Gleniln, but your father was asking for you, and wishes to see you before retiring."

With a sigh of relief the young girl turned to the new-comer.

"Please tell my father I will join him instantly;" and as he left the room she continued: "You will, I am sure, excuse me, Mr. Elliot, it is very late, and my father waits. Permit me to bid you good-night."

"Who and what is that man?" inquired Mr. Elliot, ignoring her remark, and with his eyes still fixed on the door.

"That gentleman's name is Carlyon; he is my father's secretary. Good-night, Mr. Elliot." And, proudly drawing up her little figure, Miss Gleniln turned away. But her companion hastened to intercept her at the door, and eagerly whispered—

"May I see you to-morrow?"

"Not too early, please; I shall scarcely be visible before noon." And she would have gone, but he seized the hand at her side to raise it to his lips, when a sharp growl from Vedo stayed him. He dropped her hand, and Myowne was gone.

"Death to that white-faced fellow for coming in and

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interfering just at the most important moment! I feel like a tiger thirsting for his blood; and her little dog too—all against me. Ah!" he continued, changing his mood, "she is a dainty morsel; proud, too, as a queen. Her airs of superiority become her now; but later on, when her haughty ladyship is mine, she must learn new ways, and perhaps——"

His thoughts were brought to an abrupt close by the entrance of a footman, who, apologising for intruding, asked the belated guest if he would take some wine before leaving. Uttering an impatient negative, Mr. Elliot left the room, found his wraps, and slowly quitted the house.

It was a rough, cold night; the wind had risen and was tearing down the street; in an instant it had lifted Mr. Elliot's hat and sent it spinning along the road, and as that worthy hurried after it he uttered a bitter oath.

When Myowne joined her father she became aware that some trouble was weighing heavily upon him. His usually genial, pleasant face was clouded, and his manner nervous. He spoke slowly and deliberately, as if repeating a carefully-prepared lesson, often passing a long, lean hand over his delicate face.

"Myowne, the time has come to speak to you without reserve; try to understand me. My darling, I have tried to be a good father to you."

Myowne looked into the face which, above all others, she loved dearly, and, sinking on a hassock, she clasped her hands on her father's knee.

"You have ever been all that is good and kind, and I love you with all my heart."

The father rested his hand on her head, caressing the glossy hair.

"People say I am rich—so I am; but we all have our troubles, Myowne, and I have mine. When your Uncle Emanuel died he left his wealth to you on one condition—that you should marry the gentleman who perchance might make you a proposal on this day, or, in default thereof, accept the first offer after this birthday."

Myowne suddenly paled, and her hands trembled on her father's knee.

"Now it so happens that I had an offer for your hand this morning from Harrison Elliot, the son of my old friend, whose wife—well—well, she loved him, not me, and this is her son, who loves you. He is well-to-do, will make his mark ere long, and—and——"

The uneven, wavering voice ceased as Mr. Gleniln's eyes rested on his daughter's pale face.

"And what did you tell him?"

"I sent him to you." And in a more steady voice he continued: "Your Uncle Emanuel was a bachelor; he never married because he loved once and lost. After you were born he set all the affection of his heart on you, and when you were eight years old he died, making you his heiress on the condition he mentioned, and also bequeathing to me a considerable sum. If you refuse, however, the whole fortune would revert to a distant cousin."

"And if it was so would you suffer?" asked Myowne.

"Not severely, though I must confess I have counted on my very generous share to retrieve some heavy losses. Did Harrison propose to you to-day?" There was something half of eagerness, half of trouble, in the question.

"Yes, father, he did."

"And you."

"I—I shall see him again during to-morrow."

"You love him, then?" asked her father, as if with relief.

"I don't know my own heart; I think I love no one but you."

The words were sadly spoken as the head again drooped; then suddenly she added: "Does Mr. Elliot know about the will?"

"Mr. Elliot is in Messrs. Goldroy's office, where the will has been kept since your uncle made it—he may know something about it; but that thought could hardly influence his love for you. He tells me he has thought of you for years."

There was a slightly incredulous look in the large, dark eyes raised to her father's face as Myowne rose from her seat.

"Tell me, father—will it please you to see this marriage without considering the will?"

"Yes, child, it will please me, for he is her son, and must be good and true, as she was. Still I would not force you to do anything against your wish."

"And these losses that you mentioned—will the money that comes to you really be a help?" How timidly she spoke! How nervously the fingers of her hands twined and untwined! Mr. Gleniln was almost as uneasy as herself, but he tried to speak calmly.

"Yes, I do need the money, though I could manage without."

Myowne looked at the loved face before her, and then clasping her arms round her father's neck, she kissed him gently, saying with an effort—

"Good-night, dear dad; I'll think it over, and tell you later." And before he could reply she had left the room.

Mr. Gleniln gave a sigh of mingled content and anxiety as he murmured:

"Her son! Am I right? Yes; her son could never be anything if not good and true." And with these words repeating themselves in his mind he sought repose.

It was near the late dinner-hour when Myowne was informed that Mr. Elliot was in the drawing-room. With trembling steps she descended the long flight of stairs, and as she reached the lower one her foot slipped, and she would have fallen had it not been for Mr. Carlyon, who at that moment happened to approach.

"Are you hurt?" he asked eagerly.

"No, thank you; only a little shaken."

The next instant she entered the spacious drawing-room. Mr. Elliot was standing with his back to the fire, watching the door. In the firelight, with the red glow on his dark hair and the glad light in his eyes, even to Myowne's eyes he appeared at his best. But there was no timid reserve in the girl's manner as she advanced towards him. He held out his hand, and as she placed hers in it the words fell quickly from his lips:

"Myowne, I have come for my answer; what is my fate to be?"

Without drawing away her hand the girl quietly looked up into his eyes, and as she spoke her voice sounded low and constrained.

"You wish me for your wife. Will you, then, answer me one or two questions honestly, truthfully?"

With some dignity he replied: "I could not answer otherwise than truthfully when it is you who ask."

Gently, and as if unintentionally, she withdrew her hand from his.

"Forgive me. You ask my reply to one question. I would have your answer first. You told me yesterday

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that you love me. I do not wish to doubt you; but if I were poor and helpless, would you love me then as now?"

With an exclamation of joy Mr. Elliot bent forward, about to clasp Myowne in his arms. He had long hungered for a kiss from those proud young lips, and seeing her as she was now, so gentle and kindly-spoken, he felt the desire very strong upon him; but she put out her hand to keep him off, and, controlling the passion within him, he answered:

"I would love you always as now."

"You do not, then, marry for money. I am glad to know this, for I shall be very rich before long, and I intend settling some of the wealth I shall inherit upon my father, and I might not so readily be able to do so if my husband were in love with gold."

There was a sinister light in his grey eyes, but it instantly disappeared as he asked: "And is this all?"

"Not quite all," she answered, more softly than before, and looking down. "I would like you to understand one thing clearly. If I marry you——"

"If you marry me! Then—oh! my darling, you do love me?"

But Myowne drew away. "I wish I could say so. It is this I wanted to tell you." And now for the first time a slight blush rose to her face. "I never knew any other love than that which fills my heart for my dear father. Will you then, and can you teach me that other lesson I, a willing pupil, would gladly learn from you?"

With rapture Elliot clasped her in his arms, and so closely, and his lips rested on hers so passionately, that with a slight cry of fear she withdrew from his embrace, and half-smiling, shyly whispered: "Wait—I—I—am not your wife yet. Go to my father; I think he expects you." And without another word she hastily left the room.

"Teach her the lesson of love! Ye gods, what a glorious task! What a pleasure to kindle light in those dark eyes of hers! She shall learn to love me, I swear it; and it should be an easy matter. We shall see, we shall see! Let the past die. It must be forgotten. The future rises on golden wings."

Six months after the wedding took place, and fashion proclaimed it the great event of the season. Bridesmaids, groomsmen, guests, flowers, favours, presents, music, speeches, toasts, and good wishes. A handsome new carriage, white horses, and away to the station in a shower of rice; alone together, and off for the honeymoon.

CHAPTER II.

The Letter.

The night was cold and cheerless, just such another night as that one ten years ago. At a window watching the weather, the pedestrians, as they battled with the wind, the vehicles passing to and fro, stood a woman, still and pale, dreaming dreams one within another, and all falling to pieces one after another. Only once she partly turned, when the door opened and a man entered the room. Even then in the semi-darkness she drew closer to the window, almost as if to avoid notice. But a strange voice, uttering her name, called her forth, and, with trembling fingers, she raised the lowered light, exclaiming:

"Good Heavens! Mr. Carlyon!"

"Pardon my intrusion, Mrs. Elliot," said that gentleman. "I have sought you everywhere; I am the bearer of news. Can you hear it calmly if I give it you now?"

There was a long pause, during which the visitor noted the plainly-furnished, small room, the weary look of the lady, and contrasted all this with what had been ten years ago.

Myowne spoke, but her voice had lost the fresh ring of former years, and was sadly broken. "I—I am so glad to see you; it seems like the dear old times of long ago. And you come from my father? You have news—a letter? Ah! tell me quickly, and relieve my anxiety."

"You do not look well; take a glass of wine before reading this. Believe me, you need all your courage."

"Thanks," she answered gently. "I never touch wine now; it—it does not agree with me. But why do you look so grave? You know what this letter contains? My—dear—father—is—"

"You have guessed the sorrowful truth. He is at rest."

With a calmness whose effort was sad to contemplate, Myowne read the letter through.

"Will you kindly explain why this letter is dated six years ago?"

"I will endeavour to explain everything. You remember the dreadful failure of the bank which, two years after your marriage, ruined you and Mr. Gleniln?"

"Shall I ever forget it?" murmured Myowne.

"You left England hardly a month later, just before he returned from the continent, where he had been staying for his health. Everything had to be sold, and Mr. Gleniln never quite recovered after that. He travelled about from place to place, utterly hopeless,

"Vedo's collar! How did you get that back?"

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and not even trying to rouse himself. The little he had left sufficed to keep him till the end came, two years later. I saw him a few days before, when he charged me to place that letter, his last farewell, in your own hands. There is not much more to tell," continued her companion. "I had heard of the Australian gold-fields, and intended seeking my fortune there. I also knew that you had gone to that country with Mr. Elliot two years before, and I hoped to find you.

"When I first arrived here I made every possible inquiry but failed in tracing you. I was taken ill soon after, and nursed back to life by a young fellow who had been at the diggings and intended returning. On my recovery he persuaded me to join him, and I did so. Three weeks ago I returned to Melbourne, intending to spend a little while there, and to make further inquiries before starting for home, having been fortunate enough to make what out here we call 'my pile.'"

Myowne had listened intently, yet with the same weary look in her dark eyes. She congratulated him, and asked how he had found her out. In a hesitating voice Carlyon replied:

"Why, in rather a singular fashion. You see, I bought a dog, a small rough terrier. I wanted a collar for the little fellow, and in a window of a second-hand shop I saw one," (here he lowered his voice almost to a whisper) "bearing the name I knew so well, 'Vedo.' To my mind there was but one Vedo. Where the collar was, or had been, the dog might be, and there I should find his mistress. After three weeks' patient search I traced you; and here," he added softly, "is Vedo's collar." He gently placed it in the hand that lay on her lap, and, with delicacy of feeling, turned to the window.

The weather outside was still boisterous, but it was now raining fast, and gusts of wind rattled the ill-fastened window. The little clock on the mantelpiece in a weak-minded, feeble manner informed him that it was six. As he turned he found Myowne had left her seat and was standing near him. She seemed almost unable to speak, but held out her hand to him; as he took it in both of his a sad smile came to her lips, and she said:

"Gold has brought me much sorrow, but in poor Vedo's golden collar it has to-night given me a friend." Then, hastily withdrawing her hand, she turned towards the door. "I would ask you to stay and—and meet my husband, but I don't know when he will be home, and perhaps your time——"

"Your clock just now warned me that I have little time left. It is six, and business calls me even at this hour, for I expect to leave Melbourne for England next week. May I venture to hope I shall see you once more?"

Myowne looked up in her own proud way. "Indeed, I will be pleased to see you. I shall expect you soon again." And Carlyon left the room, while Myowne wearily sank into a chair.

Hardly a moment later the door was roughly opened, and Mr. Elliot entered. He was little altered, the added years became him, and the fire of his eyes was unquenched. As he approached Myowne went towards him and raised her face to his.

"What's the matter now?" he exclaimed impatiently. "Always wanting to be kissed like a child. Will you never become sensible? Pshaw! don't bother me." And he turned away, hardly noticing the pained look in his wife's face. "Who has been here this afternoon?" he continued, taking a pipe off the mantelpiece and filling it.

"No one for you, dear," was the quiet reply.

The pipe lit, Harrison, as usual, made himself comfortable in the arm-chair, and, looking round the room, his eye fell upon Mr. Gleniln's letter lying near him.

"What letter is that?"

"A—a letter from my father."

"Your father, eh? He has been long enough writing it. What does the old fool say for himself?"

"Ah! don't, Harrison; don't speak of him like that."

"Like what? Calling him an old fool? He was an old fool, or he would never have been ruined, or made a fool of me. Confound him! What are you whimpering about now? Always turning the tap on. It is enough to try the patience of a saint to be tied to a woman who is only a spiritless burden. I could get along first-rate if I were alone; I always did before I was silly enough to get married. Now I have to support a wife and find myself on nothing." And Mr. Elliot, feeling himself very much injured, viciously puffed at his pipe. Myowne was evidently used to these outbursts of temper, for she did not immediately reply. Then, with a little gasp of a half-suppressed sigh she said very gently and pleadingly—

"Remember, Harrison, dear, I have done all I could for you; be just. We have had so much trouble, that it has broken my spirit."

"That's right!" exclaimed the man; "rub it in, reproach me, throw it into my teeth that I dragged you down! Tell me I ruined your life and spoilt your chances; bring it up as often as you can, till you goad me into a passion, and then put on an air of injured innocence, and make me out a heartless wretch. I suppose I gave up nothing in marrying you?"

Myowne looked down upon her husband with a strange expression in her eyes.

"I thought you married me because you loved me."

"There! now you are getting into the sentimental mood. Loved you? What an ass I should have been not to have loved a girl with such a fortune as you were to have; but, confound my luck, everything always was against me, and smash went your father's bank."

"Then—you never really cared for me—at—all?"

"Cared for you? Oh, yes; you were a very fascinating, enticing, innocent little girl then, and that sort of thing generally attracts a man. But after you were once my wife—well, you see, the bloom was off the peach, and there was nothing more to—to wish for." A short, coarse laugh ended the sentence, which Mr. Elliot considered an exceedingly witty one.

"But," timidly remarked Myowne, "you said——"

"Of course I said, any man in my position would have done and said as I said and did. I wanted your money, and I wanted yourself while the fancy lasted, and when I wearied of you, soon after our three months' honeymoon, then I wanted your money without you."

"Why could you not love me for myself alone? Was that impossible?" And there was something infinitely touching in the soft, quivering voice.

"Why? Because you are not my style. I like a woman with some spirit. There, drop the subject. We are tied together, and, I suppose, must make the best of it. What does your father say in his letter?"

"My father wrote the letter six years ago. He—is—dead." With the last word Myowne's head fell, and she covered her face.

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"Dead, eh! What will become of the money he lived upon? By George! he might have left it to us."

"He could not. Don't you remember it was an annuity, and died with him?"

"Yes, of course; that is just like his mean selfishness. How did the letter find you?"

"Mr. Carlyon had it with him for six years, and only succeeding in finding us to-day."

"That white-faced puppy! I'd like to horsewhip him within an inch of his life. I suppose that was the man I knocked against in the dark passage. Great Moses! if I had known who it was. Like his infernal impudence to dare to call upon you! Your father's paid hireling! I'd like to make him dance!"

"Remember, Harrison, Mr. Carlyon is a gentleman."

"Hold your tongue, you—you——"

"Ah, don't, don't!" And trembling violently, Myowne shrunk away from her husband's chair, and as she did so her eyes suddenly fell upon Vedo's collar still lying on the table, and in an instant her husband had possessed himself of it.

"Vedo's collar, by all that's holy! How did you get that back? Speak, or by Heaven, I'll——"

In a few trembling words Myowne related the story.

"So he gave you your dog's collar. After buying it in a pawnshop, he offered it to you, his master's daughter—you whom he had the audacity to love!"

"What!" exclaimed Myowne, now breathless with excitement.

"Oh! I knew it in the old days. It was plain enough. I often wondered you didn't see it yourself. I hated him from the first; I hated his smooth-spoken tongue, his superior airs, his dignity—dignity, forsooth! in a hireling. You must return this collar at once. You don't want it, as the dog is dead. Do you hear what I say?"

"But, Harrison, I do not even know where Mr. Carlyon lives; besides, it seems so unkind, after his kindness."

"Are you going to teach me right from wrong?" exclaimed her husband, turning upon her furiously, with threatening arm upraised. "Mark me, you jade, I don't care one jot how or when you do it, but return that collar you shall! Do you understand me? If you don't——".

Myowne, who had turned very pale, and shivered, hesitated a moment; then, overcoming her unwillingness, and kneeling down beside her husband, she clasped her arms round his neck.

"Harrison, dear, forgive me if I ask you not to urge me to do this. I have always tried to be good and true to you—always obeyed you in all things; please don't insist in this matter." And as she spoke she drew nearer, and touched his cheek with her lips. It was but a moment. She could never clearly remember how it really did happen.

There was a sharp knock at the door just as he was roughly pushing her away, trying to disengage himself from the clinging arms; and before she could fully rise to her feet his heavy hand struck her, and she fell prone to the ground.

"Botheration!" exclaimed Elliot, as he raised his now insensible wife and laid her on the sofa; and, finding the knocking continued, he opened the door to greet a telegraph boy with a message for him. While reading it his yes fell upon Myowne. "What infernal luck I have! Everything is always against me," he muttered between his teeth. "I must go at once to the hotel, or, by Heavens! there will be trouble. The dickens take the woman!"

Doubly bewildered now, he stared helplessly at his wife, dropped the telegram on the table, and then dashed water into her white, still face, till she revived and very painfully raised herself, with the half-whispered words:

"Thank you, I am better now."

"That is a comfort anyhow. I am thankful for small mercies in these pleasant times. I have to see a fellow on business at once; don't suppose I shall be long." And thus saying, he left the room.

It was some time before Myowne could collect her scattered senses, but, after a while, she slowly and gradually remembered, and, with a sigh, tried ineffectually to rise.

And now, as a panorama, appeared the pictures of her past life—so full of comfort and of love the earlier ones; so full of misery, of lovelessness, the ones that followed. The respectful, kindly face of her father's

Carlyon gently placed his hands upon her shoulders.

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secretary, of the happy by-gone times—more kindly, as she had lately seen it—was the picture which seemed to present itself most vividly to her. Shuddering, as with cold, she wearily closed her eyes. Some time later the little clock, in its usual apologetic tones, announced that it was seven, and Myowne rose, still weak and shaken. On the table lay the telegram, and, still preoccupied with her thoughts, almost unconsciously she read aloud :

" Just arrived from England ; at Turner's hotel. If you don't come to me at once, shall call at your house. " Pauline Marryat."

The last word had hardly passed her lips, and Myowne was still trying to understand what she had been reading when, after a light tap at the door, a woman entered. She was of a fine figure, set off by fashionable dress ; a decidedly handsome face, rich auburn hair, with the glint of gold in it ; and fine bluish-grey eyes, that sparkled like jewels. Her features were clear-cut, and the face would have been called a good one but for the thick-lipped mouth, which curved disagreeably. The lady looked round the room with a contemptuous smile.

" Excuse me, I called to see Mr. Elliot."

Myowne looked at the stranger calmly. " Mr. Elliot is out. I presume you are the Pauline Marryat mentioned here ? " And she held up the telegram.

" Yes, I am Miss Marryat," answered the stranger, seating herself in the arm-chair. " If the gentleman is out, I shall wait till he returns."

A little of the long-lost spirit of former days came to Myowne's aid, and, facing her visitor, she said more sharply than was her wont :

" It would be better if you returned later ; it is not convenient for you to remain here. I must ask you to leave this room."

" Hoity toity ! We are on our dignity, eh ? Not con-ve-ni-ent ? We'll soon see about that. I don't think Mr. Elliot will turn me out. Who are you, pray ? " And the angry woman rose from her seat, staring boldly at Myowne.

" I am Mr. Elliot's wife."

" His wife ! I thought you were his servant. Merciful Heavens ! Was it for such an insignificant thing that my Harrison left me ? I could have borne it better had you been something to look at ; but pale, thin, too, and—faugh ! He must have been mad."

Myowne was almost speechless, hardly knowing how to answer this tirade. She hesitated, trying to choose her words, and after an effort said :

" I know nothing of you but your name ; you know who I am, and are evidently acquainted with my husband. You owe it to me, having entered my room unasked, to at least tell me what you want with Mr. Elliot, and who and what you are."

" That you shall soon know. I was Harrison Elliot's promised wife ; he loved me passionately, and only left me to marry your gold. You never could have cared for him, as I did—as I do still, in spite of his cruelty in throwing me over and leaving me deserted, alone to fight the world's slanderous tongue—and he knows all this—and he loves me the same as ever, and has done so all along. So much for you, my fine ladybird ! But I swore I'd be revenged on you, and I will. I hate you, you miserable piece of humanity."

In her excitement, with shining eyes and burning cheeks, the woman approached Myowne closer, and with an evil look, as if intending to strike her, she hurled these words at her—" I'd have you die in misery and wretchedness, unloved, neglected, and alone. May you be accursed as my life has been through you, for you robbed me of the only human being I ever loved ! "

With such wildness had Pauline Marryat spoken that her voice drowned every other noise. In the midst of her cruel speech the door had been pushed open unnoticed, and in the momentary silence that followed Mr. Carlyon stepped forward.

" Pardon me, is this lady here with your consent, Mrs. Elliot ? "

" No, indeed. Her desire was to see Mr. Elliot ; but he went out about half-past six. I think almost immediately after receiving this telegram."

" Half—past—six," slowly and mechanically repeated Miss Marryat. " Half—past—six—received—and I sent that telegram at nine o'clock this morning. He must at once have gone to the hotel, and I thought his absence intentional and have missed him."

She was now wonderfully subdued, and hastily left the room.

There was a pause, during which the tears were fast gathering in Myowne's eyes.

" Pardon me," said Carlyon, " but when I took out the letter from your father I must have dropped a paper of great value to me. Ah, here it is." Turning to Mrs. Elliot, he was startled to see her with her face buried in the sofa cushion, sobbing bitterly. The silence in the room, the monotonous ticking of the clock, the rain beating against the window, and the painful, now quite uncontrollable sobs of the poor girl whom he so tenderly loved, made the time a most trying one for him. Everything seemed a living, sentient being ; everything had a voice, and urged him to comfort the unhappy creature before him.

" Mrs. Elliot, I beseech you, tell me—say what can I do for you ? " He paused anxiously, then took a few steps nearer to the sofa, and instinctively lowered his voice. " Speak to me. Ah ! let me but hear your voice."

Myowne heard him now. The sobs became less violent, and gradually ceased ; and after a little while she raised her head. And there was that in the soft eyes fixed upon her which she knew had always been there, only that formerly she did not understand it ; now it thrilled her to the heart, and her own eyes, still heavy with weeping, dropped before his. To speak was impossible, and Carlyon, his whole being stirred within him, turned away. A moment later a hand was laid upon his arm, and Myowne stood beside him. With something of an effort she looked up into his face, while

On her pallid cheek and forehead came a colour and a light,
As I have seen the rosy red flushing in the northern night.

" May I speak, and will you forgive me if, in doing so, I give you pain ? "

" You are incapable of giving pain," he answered, slowly laying his hand on the one still resting on his arm. " There are some beings at whose hands death itself would be the sweetest gift ; to suffer for them is a privilege, and heaven itself draws very near to earth when we bear love's burden."

While he was speaking Myowne had drawn back a little and her hand fell from his. She found it difficult to reply, and her voice trembled as she spoke.

" I have not much to say—but—I think it right. Will you hear me, and—and——"

" Ah, do not shrink ! I must speak ! I will speak, come what may ! I can be silent no longer. Scorn me if you must, I——"

She turn'd her bosom shaken with a sudden storm of sighs,
All the spirit deeply dawning in the dark of hazel eyes.

"Speak not the word; let it not pass your lips, or the sweet spell will be broken, I thought to give you pain, yet wished to bid you go before you revealed the secret of our hearts. But I was too late—so late, so late. I think I knew in the dear old days but to me it was so strange and wonderful a mystery. I never understood till now; I have learnt the lesson since. But it is a dream, a fancy, something we can think about that will help us to be good and true as long as life remains."

"Life! Ah! what is life when separation makes it worthless," exclaimed Carlyon, gazing intently into the shining eyes raised so trustingly to his.

"Life! Life is like a myth, a phantom; to-day in our hands, to-morrow taken from us—gone like a breath that kisses the lips it touches. We live for others, not ourselves. We will try to forget what could not be; you will forget——"

"No, I cannot promise what I cannot keep. To forget what makes life worth living would be a living death. Ask me not what is impossible. Remember that I——"

She smiled a sad, wistful smile, shyly taking one of his hands. "For my sake—I know all you would say, believe me; I know all I could say, but we must be silent if we would be true. As now our hands are locked, so let our hearts, our souls, our minds be locked always together—always living in and through, and for each other. And then to meet hereafter, you and I; in everything always together!"

Carlyon looked into the beloved face, as if wishing to fix each feature indelibly on his memory, and he said, gently and tenderly, "Yes, in everything always together; truly

> "'Tis said, though from the body riven,
> The spirit ne'er can cease to be.
> Then, till it gains that other Heaven.
> Mine shall—ay, must, still cling to thee."

A hush. So still, as if some spirit, passing through the air, was sending from his pearly wings a mystic, wondrous light, and for a moment two poor mortals, forgetting all the world, were happy. Ah, how rare, how fleeting, was that beam of happiness!

Carlyon, overcome by her earnest words, inspired by her voice, her eyes fixed full on his, her hand clasped fast in his, felt himself a giant fit to fight the world, to live and die for her. She now drew him towards the door, as she spoke in kindly tones:

"Friend, let us part before trouble, swift-footed, finds us both. Say good-night."

Carlyon, still under the influence of the music of her words, gently placed his hands upon her shoulders, and spoke quietly but firmly:

"I will obey you always. But before I go I must speak once, for good and all."

"Oh, don't say it, don't say it," softly murmured Myowne.

"Be not afraid. We need not say what we both know so well. God help us! But I want you to remember I leave to you a precious charge, more precious than the most priceless jewel—life! Guard it well, promise to think that in one fair hand lies yours, in the other—you—hold—mine. Remember our watch-word—'In everything always together'!"

"I will remember."

"And you promise?"

"I promise."

"One word more. I will not see you again till you bid me come. Here is my address," giving her a card on which he pencilled a few words. "It will always find me—even if it be years hence. Send for me the instant I can be of use. Is there anything you would ask me now?"

"Nothing—nothing."

"Will you recollect all I have said?"

"All; every word is graven on my heart, and will remain with me for evermore."

"Then farewell." Hesitating for a moment, he kissed the hand he held, and was gone, as the clock, with great precision and an attempt at self-importance, struck nine.

(To be concluded next week.)

They Hadn't Any.

A GENTLEMAN one day asked a shoeblack, who was cleaning his boots near a theatre in the Strand, if he ever read the newspaper. The boy promptly replied: "Oh, yes, sir; I reads the paper." "What do you read, my lad?" inquired the gentleman. "I reads all about the murders, sir." A policeman standing near, who had heard the conversation, strolled up to the lad when the gentleman had left, and said: "Don't you ever read the police intelligence?" "Get away with you; they ain't got none," answered the sharp boy.

The Press Embraced Her.

"OH, I think it must be nice to be connected with a newspaper," said Miss M'Flinn to young Quill-driver, as they sat together one evening. "Yes, it is so," he replied. "But why do you think it is?" "Why, it has so many advantages. I should think you would glory in the freedom, the power, the liberty, and all the privileges of the Press." "Certainly I do. It's a pity with all your enthusiasm on the subject that you are not a journalist." "I think so too; but you know it is hard for a woman to get recognition. I should be delighted to feel that the Press embraced me." "Oh, you would, would you? Great Scott! wait till I turn down the gas."

THIS IS OUR NEXT WEEK'S COVER.

What the String Was For.

Two small boys in a tramcar were watching everything and talking, as boys do, when the conductor's whistle attracted them. "See the whistle," said one. "Yes," said the other; "but what's he got it tied to a string for?" This was a poser for a minute, and then the little one chirped, "I know what for. It's to keep hisself from swallerin' it."

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A Muscular Servant Girl.

A Maid who was Useful in Driving Away Pedlars and Tramps.

ONE of the most unpleasant things in connection with housekeeping in towns is the trouble ladies have in getting rid of the pedlars and tramps who call when the men are all away at their business, and who will crowd themselves into a house, even if the door is shut in their faces.

A couple of gentlemen were talking over such matters a few days since, when one of them said things had come to such a pass that he was going to give up housekeeping and live at an hotel.

"If you get the right kind of servant girl you will have no trouble," said the contented man. "You get the sister to my girl and I will warrant you will be free from such annoyances."

"Oh, servant girls are no good," said the first speaker. "I have tried forty different ones, and the pedlars talk them over, and wind up by selling them something. What does your girl do to keep them away."

"Do? What does she do? Well, it depends on the man. If he will go away quietly, when she tells him that the house doesn't want of anything, it is all right. If not she uses a persuader.

"She is a girl who has been brought up on a farm, a perfect picture of health, with an arm like a blacksmith's, and the pluck of a veteran soldier. She can do more work in a day and smile all the time, than any girl I ever saw.

"I pay her double wages just for the influence she has on pedlars. My wife is an invalid, and is nervous; a pedlar, or a canvasser, could talk her into buying anything, she is so timid, and she would be ill for a week afterwards, with nervous prostration. Mary, the girl, noticed the injury to my wife, and said she would keep the nuisances out, and I told her to do what she could.

"The next day as I went home I met a man tearing down the path, while etchings were dropping all round him from a portfolio. He had his hat jammed down over his eyes, and wore a very worried look. I stopped him at the gate and asked what the matter was.

"He said he had mistaken that lunatic asylum for a private residence, had pushed in when the door was opened, and one of the female inmates, a most violent case, had taken him by the throat, and with a power almost superhuman had thrown him out, and frightened him nearly to death.

"He asked me if I was the doctor of the asylum, and said I ought to put that girl in a straight jacket. He went away quickly, with his collar in his hand, and when I went in the house Mary and my wife were laughing very hard, and my wife was better than I had known her for a year.

"The other day a fellow with the most terrible cheek got into the parlour, and sent a card to my wife by another girl who happened to go to the door. My wife supposed it was some gentleman, and went down. The impudent, hardened rascal talked to her for half an hour on different subjects and then revealed to her that he was taking orders for some book in monthly parts.

"Well, if there is anything my wife doesn't want it is any more 'Shakespeares' or 'Picturesque Zululands' in instalments. Four years ago she subscribed for something of the kind, and they have been delivered regularly every fortnight, and always when my wife didn't happen to have a penny in the house. She told him she didn't want the book in a few well-chosen words, but he insisted that while she thought she didn't want it, she actually did. She pleaded that she did not feel very well, and asked him to call again, but he said he would remain now he was there, and proceeded to show her some more pictures, and tell her how many orders he had taken in that street.

"Some ladies called, and she asked him to excuse her, but he said he would wait till they had gone, and when they came into the parlour he actually joined in the conversation, and asked one of the callers if she wouldn't like to look at the book. He said it was only half-a-crown per month.

"That made my wife furious. She can stand a good deal, and keep her temper, but that was too much, and she rang the bell for Mary. Mary came as smiling and pretty as you ever saw a girl in all your born days.

"My wife said, 'Mary, please conduct this gentleman to the conservatory.'

"Mary smiled, and said, 'This way, please,' and the agent followed her into the front hall, and before he knew whether he was in a conservatory or a boiler factory, Mary took him by the back of the neck and pitched him through the door head first, and down the stone steps on his head. He turned a somersault, lit on his feet, jumped the fence, and ran to a field where some boys were playing football.

"In about half an hour a boy came to the door and said a gentleman who had called a short time before, and who came away somewhat suddenly, begged that the lady of the house would kindly send him his hat and a book of samples of a work he was selling on the instalment plan. He said he was sorry to trouble the lady, but he wanted the hat in order to make a call in the neighbourhood. His things were sent to him, and he has never been back since.

"No, sir; I wouldn't let Mary go for twice what I pay her."

"I wish you would give me the address of Mary's sister," said the young man, taking out a pencil and paper. "If I could get such a girl as that I would continue to keep house." The demand for good muscular girls is increasing, and they can get their own prices.

P. W. OLLING.

IT IS ALWAYS INTERESTING

to know other people's opinion of yourself, especially when that opinion is absolutely unbiassed.

If you want to know what sort of a person you are send a specimen of your handwriting to

RANEE, 32 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

enclosing six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope.

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Too Small to Disobey.

"I CAN command my salary," said the Thespian in reply to the remarks of an envious rival. "No doubt," was the reply. "It is so small it would be afraid to disobey you."

The Wrong Meaning.

DRAWING MASTER: "Now, boys, I want you to draw something out of your own heads." Small Boy (handing master a hair): "Please, sir, will one hair do, 'cos it hurts to pull out many?"

It Had a Language.

SOPHIA (sentimentally): "I dearly love to listen to the ticking of a clock. It seems to me that a clock has a language of its own." Mr. Smart: "Yes, Sophia, the clock has a language—you might say a dial-ect."

Merely a Detail.

HE (after an elopement): "You led me to infer that you would inherit twenty thousand pounds." She: "No, I didn't. I said my father was worth that much." He: "Well, but you never said a word about having fourteen brothers and sisters." She: "I didn't suppose that you wanted to marry the whole family."

Didn't Want to Hurt Him.

"CAN you do anything with my account to-day, sir?" asked a collector. "I'd like to pay it," replied Gazzam, "but the fact is I haven't any gold coin, and the doctors say that paper money carries the influenza microbe about. Can't be too careful, you know, and I wouldn't pay you with paper money for all the world."

George Couldn't Have Noticed.

CLARA: "When George and I are married I'm to have my own way in everything." Dora: "But you won't." Clara: "Indeed I will. That's the bargain. Don't you remember, I told you he proposed in a boat, and asked if I'd float through life with him just that way?" Dora: "Yes." Clara: "Well he was rowing, but I was steering."

Not Made to Last.

CUSTOMER: "That 'boys' tool chest' I bought of you was a fraud. The tools didn't last a week." Dealer: "Eh? You must have been using them yourself?" "Of course." "Those tools were intended for boys, not men. They would have lasted your boy a year at least." "I handled them more carefully than a boy would." "No doubt. But you used them a week. A boy would have tired of them in two days and a half."

Better than Medicine.

WILLIS: "Did the doctor do anything to hasten your recovery?" Wallace: "Oh, yes; he told me he was going to charge me a guinea a visit."

Well Marked!

"HIS attentions to you have been marked, have hey not?" said the young woman's experienced friend. "Oh, yes. He has never taken the price tag off any of his presents."

Couldn't Understand Much.

MARY: "I wonder why swells wear an eye-glass?" Jane: "Why, to block up one eye, so that they shall just see as much as they can understand at a time."

Force of Habit.

"TAPES can't get over his old haberdashery manner now that he is a house-builder." "What has he done?" "Sold a man a house the other day and asked him if he wanted it sent."

Like Her Hair.

EDWIN (tenderly touching her tresses): "Sweet one, let me be like this lovely hair." Angelina (tremulously): "What, dearest, what would you be?" Edwin (rapturously): "All your own."

Was He to Choose?

JONES' better half had presented him with twins. When nurse brought them into the room for inspection, the poor man was so bewildered at the multitudinous character of his happiness that he asked: "Am I to choose?"

It Was His Night.

A YOUNG man sent his girl a box of grapes one afternoon lately, and the next day a fellow met him in the street and said: "Those grapes were jolly good last night. Send some up every Wednesday evening; that's my night, you know."

Likely to Stay at Home.

MRS. WESTEND: "Good morning, Mr. Northend. I want to run in and see your wife. Is she at home?" Mr. Northend: "Yes; she'll be at home all day. When I left she was trying to make up her mind to go out and have a tooth extracted."

He Had His Life.

PRISONER (to Judge): "Make it as light as you can your lordship. I was the means of saving you from sustaining serious injury." Judge: "What do you mean?" Prisoner: "Why, some years ago I threw a boot at your lordship's head, but I missed it!"

Bruised with Ideas.

"YOUR husband is not looking well to-night, Mrs. Rhymer." "He isn't, and I'm not surprised at it." "No? Has he been overworking himself?" "It isn't that so much; it's his originality. Why that man is struck by so many original ideas that his mind must be one mass of bruises."

Wouldn't Let the Clothes Spoil.

"I'VE a great notion to go and jump into the river," said Mr. N. Peck at the end of a little domestic discussion, as he took his hat and started out. "You come back," said his wife. "If you intend any such trick as that, just march upstairs and put on your old clothes before you start."

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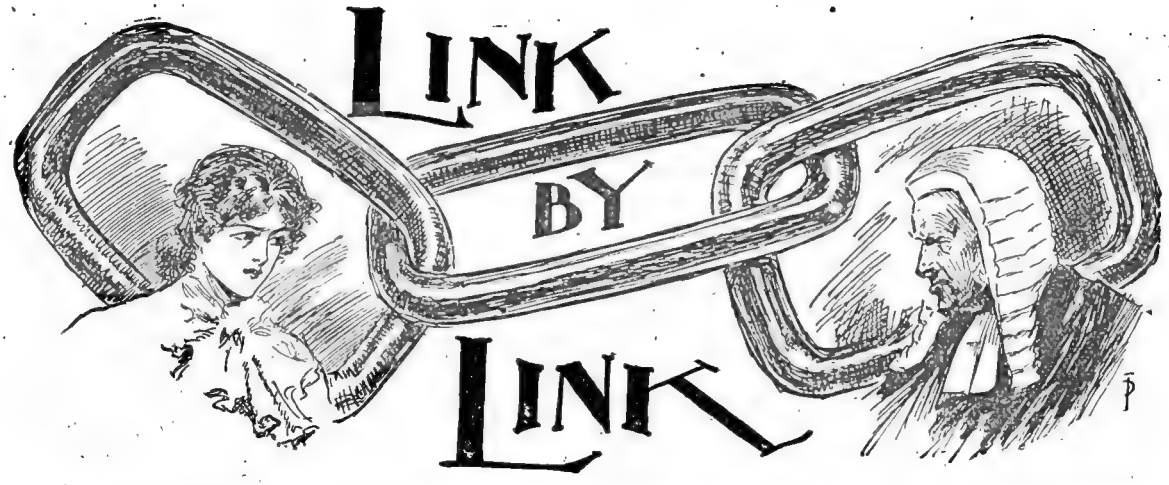

Principal Characters in the Story.

Gerald Mortimer: Of Moulstone Manor, in love with Nina Penhurst.

Mrs. Mortimer: Gerald's mother.

Dr. Branksome: Medical attendant at Moulstone asylum, a great friend of Gerald.

Anthony (or Felix) Cordelvin: An inmate of Moulstone asylum, who was found murdered.

Nina Penhurst: Governess at Moulstone Manor, a distant relative of Cordelvin.

Roderick Vanstone: Nina's guardian. He lives at Streatham, and has under his charge a man named Cordelvin, of weak intellect, whose estate, held in trust for Nina, he manages.

Stephen Vanstone: Roderick Vanstone's son.

The woman in the dark blue cloak: She was seen at Moulstone on the night of the murder, and has acted rather suspiciously since.

Stebbings and Burge: Men employed by Vanstone.

Inspector Trench: Of Scotland Yard, who is intrusted with the task of discovering the murderer of Cordelvin.

CHAPTER XV. (*continued.*)

The Face of a Dead Man.

For a few seconds the sudden appearance of the face over the shutters of the window had an effect that was well-nigh paralysing on Gerald Mortimer. For picture his impressions. The first was that he beheld in that face the re-vivified features of the dead man whom he himself had recently discovered among the ruins of Moulstone Castle; the next that in some strange, incomprehensible manner, the face had taken to itself the eyes of the woman in the blue cloak, whom, on two recent occasions, he had encountered under unusual circumstances. Considering all things, it was little wonder, then, that for a few moments his powers of reflection were, so to speak, stunned, and rendered incapable of convincing him that what he instinctively thought, could not possibly be.

Relief of the mental tension came when the lunatic outside on the ladder coolly put his elbow through the window-pane in order to get a better view.

"Ha! ha!" he murmured half to himself, but loud enough to enable Gerald Mortimer to hear distinctly, "a prisoner in the cells! The first case that will come before me as Lord Mayor. Ha! ha! ha!" He laughed a little hysterically, and then added gravely: "Prisoner, what have you to say for yourself? Are you guilty or not guilty? I'm the Chief Magistrate, you must know."

The sudden transition from hysterical laughter to a ludicrous gravity which the face had undergone, was sufficient to have sent Gerald off into a hearty fit of laughter, in spite of the awe-stricken feelings he had experienced just before. In his latest development of the incident, however, there broke through the mist of depression into which he had sunk, a glimmer of hope, and he restrained his mirth.

The whole explanation of the incident came upon him in one illuminating moment. The man outside was, of course, Anthony Cordelvin. His resemblance to Felix Cordelvin, although extraordinary, was explainable by their relationship. That need not be discussed now. The important point for him was that his questioner was mad, and was now labouring under the impression that he was a magistrate and that Gerald was a prisoner, intended to be brought up before him. In that circumstance lay the glimmer of hope which Gerald had at once perceived.

His association with Dr. Branksome at the asylum, added to his own common sense, had instructed him somewhat in the ways of the insane. Above everything else, he knew that the one thing to do was to humour a man labouring under a delusion, if one wished to keep him calm.

These thoughts all passed through his mind far quicker than it takes to write them. With the last words of the lunatic still in his ears, he made answer:

"Your worship, I am not guilty. Of course, I can't expect you to acquit me without a formal trial, but in respect to that I have a complaint to make against the gaolers."

The madman outside the window cocked his head on one side with comical dignity as he considered the words. The respectful manner, the mien of deference which the prisoner adopted, flattered his poor, deluded sense of his own magisterial importance. He puckered his brows and frowned down.

"Complaint, complaint?" he demanded, "and what is the nature of your complaint? I'll have no bad treatment; none at all. Eh?"

"I have to complain," responded Gerald, with the utmost gravity, "that your worship's gaolers have bound my hands. They have thus prevented me from preparing my defence. I can't write, you see."

The poor maniac once more cocked his head and considered. The words seemed reasonable to him, the complaint justifiable. He was about to tell the prisoner so when a trick of his demented mind prevented him following the discussion for a moment.

"Polar bear-skins!" he broke out suddenly; "I don't like Polar bear-skins! Think they're the thing? Vanstone's getting them for me, and says they're all right, but think Vanstone knows?"

Gerald Mortimer had not the faintest idea of the drift of these last remarks. But, as has been said, he was

acquainted with the ways of the insane, and promptly followed up the change of subject, with the idea of bringing it round to his own position again at the earliest moment.

"That's the question, your worship," he answered; "Polar bear-skins may be all very well, but they may *not*. You hit the right nail on the head when you ask, does Vanstone know? Vanstone's played *me* false. Why shouldn't he play *you* false, too?"

As the significance of these words sank into the mind of the madman, his erstwhile serene face underwent a remarkable change. His rolling eyes suddenly took unto themselves a look of suspicion, deepening into fierce distrust. What he would have replied it is impossible to say, for all without warning he moved, his head lowered, and, a moment later, disappeared from Gerald's view altogether.

The explanation of this sudden movement was that the madman had suddenly been apprised of the return of Burge, by hearing a distant footstep on the gravel. Imbued with the cunning which so frequently characterises men with distorted minds, Cordelvin hastily descended to the ground, and hurriedly replaced the ladder on the spot from which he had taken it.

Whether the returning Burge noticed any part of this manœuvre is not certain. Even if he had, and he had had the opportunity, it would not have been politic for him to make very much of the affair. To inform Mr. Vanstone of the lunatic's antics during his absence would be to accuse himself of negligence, and an explanation of his absence would be demanded.

As it was, the opportune appearance of Ned Stebbings precluded questions, and the incident passed undiscussed.

Stebbings brought a message for the instant return to the house of Mr. Cordelvin.

Hardly had be executed this message and seen it carried out than a ring came at the front door. It was the postman. There was only one letter; it was addressed to Roderick Vanstone—no "Esquire," no description of any kind; merely the name and address. Stebbings carried the letter to his master and withdrew.

Roderick Vanstone turned the letter over curiously for a moment. He did not recognise the handwriting, and the absence of all courtesy title made him lift his eyebrows. He tore the envelope open.

And then, whatever slight surprise there had been in his face before breaking the seal, was startlingly increased as he perused the letter. His features spasmodically drew together, the blood first rushing to them in a reddening torrent and then as quickly leaving them in a ghastly, twitching pallor.

Stephen Vanstone, as usual, idly sitting and smoking, saw the change.

"Hullo! what's up?" he inquired.

His father answered nothing. His eyes were fixed in vacancy on the floor, his mind was working to control its own agitation. The son repeated his question. Roderick Vanstone drew himself together, breathed heavily and quaveringly through his nostrils, and stepped, with half averted head, to where his son sat.

"Read that!" he said in low, hollow accents, and handed him the letter.

This is what it said:

> "Foxes are cunning, but foxes are often destroyed by the pursuing hounds. You are a fox, and there are watchful hounds who may destroy you—one, at any rate. Oh, what a fiend you are! The devil incarnate surely! You buried *it* deep, didn't you? Out of the sight of the world, didn't you? Yet are you sure? The fox may burrow—but what if the hound shall see him burrowing? Does that make you shiver? I think I see you. Be sure and treat *him* well, or the hound may unmuzzle itself and destroy the fox."

Stephen Vanstone read the enigmatical letter

TO THE STOUT OF BOTH SEXES

A Mistake, and How to Remedy It.

Many men and women, alarmed at the inexplicable encroachments of corpulency, are desirous of taking a stone or two off their weight. They have got heavy in their movements; they find they have more difficulty in breathing freely. They are reluctantly compelled to give up athletic exercises, and outdoor pastimes become more irksome than pleasurable. The women especially suffer the mortification of being no longer so attractive, and their favourite recreations—dancing, lawn tennis, etc.—can no longer be indulged in to any enjoyable extent. The mistake is that they let the mischief go too far, the fat accumulating, the figure spoiling, and the general health deteriorating. Happily for these imprudent ones these things are easily to be remedied by the famous "Russell" treatment. The remedy is pleasant, harmless, and sure. It is truly scientific, and very simple, and a reduction of from ½lb. to 2lb. per day is guaranteed. When normal proportions are reached the treatment may be discontinued. The "Russell" treatment is very fully described, and the recipe given in "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages), by Mr. F. Cecil Russell, and any of our stout readers may obtain a copy of this wonderfully interesting book post free by sending three penny stamps to the author, at Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.—(Reprinted from *Myra's Journal.*)

THE EVILS DUE TO EXCESSIVE STOUTNESS

May be said to be proportionate to the extreme discomfort of that condition. The shortness of breath, the state of lassitude and weakness caused by abnormal stoutness, may, indeed, be symptomatic of fatty degeneration of the internal organs, and should receive prompt attention lest fatal results issue. If our stout friends should wish to be thoroughly enlightened on this vital matter, let them each obtain a copy of "Corpulency and the Cure," by Mr. F. Cecil Russell, and study it carefully. There is no phase of the subject of the causes and the cure of corpulency that our author does not touch upon in this remarkable book, and, indeed, Mr. Russell, as the originator of the famous curative system which bears his name, is well qualified to speak with authority. He gives conclusive evidence of the permanent benefits derived from his treatment. This is borne out by the extracts he gives of a good thousand of letters from grateful clients, who in many cases personally testify to an initial reduction of 2lbs. within twenty-four hours of commencing the treatment, and to proportionate daily decrease until normal weight and size have been reached. Extracts from many newspapers, scientific and general, give further endorsement to Mr. Russell's successes. We warmly commend "Corpulency and the Cure" to the attention of the corpulent, who may obtain a free copy by writing to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., not forgetting to enclose three penny stamps for postage under plain envelope.—(Reprinted from a recent issue of *Leach's Family Dressmaker.*)

through. His expression, while showing partial comprehension, betrayed considerable mystification.

"What does it mean?" he asked presently; "I don't rightly understand."

Roderick Vanstone, still engaged with his own reflections, gazed abstractedly on the carpet.

"Who can have written it?" he murmured half aloud, "who can have written it?"

"A madman, I should say!" remarked the other.

Roderick Vanstone looked up slowly; his face was still strangely pale.

"A madman!" he repeated, like one speaking from a parched throat, and shaking his head. "Not so mad as the letter would make him. Sane enough to have seen—and to remember."

"See—remember—what do you mean?"

"Why, isn't even that plain to you? Cannot you follow the references to 'burying *it* deep'? Don't you see that what we did was seen by somebody?"

"What we did—when?"

"That night—out there!" Roderick waved a hand at the window to indicate outside.

"What, in the grounds? That night when we buried the——?"

"Yes, yes. Of course it means that. But it means more—look what it says." The elder man seized the letter again and read: "You buried *it* deep? . . . Yet are you sure?" He read the words over two or three times, his lips framing them mutely, his tongue silent. Presently he again found utterance.

"I must make sure—do you hear, Stephen?" He was quite vehement now—"we must make sure."

The younger man looked as if he thought his father had taken leave of his senses.

"Sure of what?" he asked.

"Sure that the—what we buried in the grounds that night is there still."

Stephen leapt to his feet.

"Why, of course it is!" he replied, amazed. "What has put such tomfoolery into your head?"

The father gazed round with dilated eyes that had little expression in them, save that of fear.

"I have a presentiment," he observed in a low tone. "This letter has upset me. I want to make sure—I am going to make sure *to-night*."

It was strange, it was pitiable, too, in a sense, to see this unemotional, cold-blooded man stirred to his very core by this occurrence. His hands trembled, his lips twitched, and in the nervous, uncertain movements of his eyes there was plainly to be read that species of agitation which is born of fear.

For a long time he remained silent, alternately pacing the room with his hands clenched tightly together behind him, and then sitting down in his chair with his head reclining uneasily against his doubled-up fist. Always his brows were knit, leaving on his forehead two deep, brooding lines, while in his eyes there had now become fixed that set, unblinking look that betokens recent terror and a determination to remove the cause of it.

Roderick Vanstone was uneasy—more uneasy than he had been for many a day—but to-night, when others in the household had retired for the night, he, with his son, was to embark on that strange undertaking—the task of discovering whether what the letter had spoken of as *it* was still hidden from the gaze of the world; buried six feet down in the earth, in the midst of the shrubbery, over in the furthest corner of the grounds.

CHAPTER XVI.

The "Fox" and the "Hound."

The clock in a distant church had struck the hour of midnight; the lights in the old house on Streatham Hill had all been extinguished some little time. The white walls of the house stood grimly out under the pale light of the stars, like a great, sprawling, mis-shapen wraith. Outside the grounds lay in sombre darkness. Through the gaunt, bare trees the breeze passed in mournful sighs, which served but to emphasise and make more eerie the silence that otherwise brooded over the place.

Presently, from out a side door of the house, there issued two small, swinging specks of light—lanterns carried by two silent, stealthy figures. They were Roderick and Stephen Vanstone. Over the shoulder of the elder man could be faintly discerned a pickaxe, while under the disengaged arm of the younger appeared a shovel and a spade. Long ulsters covered the men's limbs, and slouch hats pulled over their eyes gave them the appearance of arch-conspirators bound on some mysterious mission.

In silence the two men walked, neither speaking as they stepped over the dew-laden turf, that chirped softly beneath their tread. They reached the beginning of the triangular shrubbery, and, skirting it, raised their lanterns and gazed keenly, as if for a landmark.

"Here's the place, isn't it?" asked Stephen Vanstone in a whisper, "these look like laurels."

The elder man lowered his lantern and, bending down, examined the wet leaves.

"Yes, this is right—twenty-five paces in now till we come to two small yew trees."

Silently once more the two moved. Nothing save the brush of their limbs and the implements they carried against the shrubs was to be heard. Mutely Roderick Vanstone was measuring his paces. He stopped at twenty-five.

"This is the place," he whispered, and said nothing more.

The lanterns were set upon the ground, and a few seconds later the first dull sound of the pick cutting through the mould was heard. Without a word or a rest, Roderick Vanstone plied the implement for five minutes. Then, having loosened the crust of the ground, both he and his son went at it with spade and shovel. It wasn't such hard work as it might have been; this very spot had been dug out by them but a little time before, and the rain and frost had had but little opportunity of hardening the mould. Speedily the hole grew deeper, the mound of earth thrown out bigger. They had penetrated over five feet down now, and any moment they might come upon the object of their search.

"It can't be much deeper," murmured Stephen, wiping his sweating face with his handkerchief; "our fool's task will soon be over now."

"If it's here!" replied his father; a slight shudder shook his frame as he uttered the words.

"If——" returned the other. "Why, of course it's here! Who would have taken the trouble to dig and take it up?"

His father did not reply. He only remembered the contents of the letter in his pocket, and shuddered again. Stephen was plying the spade now; only one at a time could work in the hole now that it was so deep.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, as suddenly the blade of the implement met with an unusually hard resistance, "that sounds like wood."

He cut and dug away the earth eagerly. The top of a long wooden box came to view—a box that might have been a doll's coffin. In a few seconds he had loosened the ground around it and was on his knees, tugging to get the box free.

"There," he said, as he lifted it, and, rising to his feet, handed it up to his father, "you see your fears were groundless. It's there, just as we left it. Look and see for yourself!"

Roderick Vanstone seized the box eagerly, bent down with it to the ground, and prised open the lid.

A mingled cry of horror and dismay escaped him. Stephen, who had leapt out of the hole by this time, asked him what was the matter.

For answer Roderick Vanstone pointed to the box.

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"Look!" was all he said.

The younger man knelt on one knee and examined the contents of the box. There was nothing save a couple of stones and a scrap of paper.

"*It* has gone!" he gasped. "Good Heavens! who can have taken it?"

Roderick Vanstone returned no answer. He was staring fixedly at the box, his limbs trembling as he knelt, his eyes having in them a look of wild despair. Stephen fumbled in a slightly bewildered fashion with the piece of paper. Something on it suddenly caught his eye.

"Writing!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Here's a written note!"

He placed the paper as close as he could to one of the lanterns and read the note. As he did so his hand shook and the paper rustled. The slight sound recalled his father to himself. He perceived the note, leant over, and snatched it desperately from his son's hand. Then he, too, read it. It was very short, and ran thus in a pencilled scrawl:

"The butcher's work is done, and cannot be undone. The work of the grave-digger, too, has been done. But I have undone that, as this note shall bear witness."

That was all. But it was sufficient to throw Roderick Vanstone into a still more violent paroxysm of fear. He looked up almost helplessly at his son.

"My worst fears are realised," was all he said.

"What does it all mean?" asked the other. Although agitated, he was, in relation to his father, comparatively calm.

"Heaven knows!" murmured Roderick. "It is all a strange, fearful business. But this note is in the same hand as the letter."

It had occurred to Stephen's imperfect recollection of the handwriting that this might be so, but now that his father's words confirmed his suspicion, it came with a shock as severe as if he had never dreamt of such a thing.

"Can it have been written by that doctor, that fellow Manisty, who performed the operation?" he asked feebly. A racking of his brain for a possible explanation had prompted the question.

Roderick Vanstone shook his head. "No, no!" he said. "There was no motive for his doing such a thing. Remember, by exposing us he would expose himself."

"It may be mere fancy," he went on after a pause, and with something like his old calmness now, "but do you know I think this is a woman's handwriting." He indicated the note as he spoke.

"A woman's! Why, what woman is there? What woman is there on the earth to take any interest in the business? There's only Nina Penhurst, and it isn't her writing; besides, she isn't the sort to do anything like this. There's no other woman. No, father, you're getting frightened, and your fears are unbalancing your common sense."

His father did not answer immediately. He was thinking hard, as could be seen by his twitching face.

"Stephen," he said presently, "what if I were to tell you that there is a woman living who might have written this note?"

The son's face took on it a look of surprise.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "What woman can there be?"

The elder man paused a moment; then he said calmly:

"Ruth Cordelvin!"

"Ruth Cordelvin? Who is she?"

"The sister of Felix Cordelvin."

"But you told me that he had only one sister, that she was half-demented, and that she lived in Australia."

"Yes; I told you that, but she may be in England now. She was, as I have learnt, always devoted to her brother, in her own peculiar, half-mad way, and although she allowed him to come to England through a quarrel, she may have followed him since."

"Oh, but it's absurd. Even supposing she is in

A Pretty Spring Blouse.

A sailor-shaped blouse in flannel, with collar of some rich material, makes a very dressy garment. If this is made of tucked muslin, inserted with lace, it sets off to great advantage a rosy and healthy complexion. Bile Beans for Biliousness provide the latter by removing all digestive troubles, and keeping the liver and kidneys in proper order. At the present season constipation, headache, lassitude, a desire to do nothing, and an all-round sense of depression and misery, trouble many girls and women. This is the sign which the system gives of its requirements. It needs toning up, and preparing for the coming summer. This work is done by Bile Beans more satisfactorily, speedily, and economically than by any other means; and in home remedies as well as in dress, ease, efficiency, and economy should always be considered.

A case where Bile Beans proved of exceptional value is given below:—Mr. L. George Webbley, of 103 Leam Terrace East, Leamington, suffered for a long period from skin eruptions, pimples indigestion, and biliousness. He was, however, cured by Bile Beans, and this is what he said to a *Leamington Advertiser* reporter:—"For three years I suffered from incessant attacks of indigestion, giving rise to various other ailments. The food I took seemed to do me no good. Painful headaches added to my suffering, and then also pimples and sores broke out on my face, which sometimes presented a dreadful spectacle.

There were red blotches everywhere; and, try as I would, there seemed to be no means at all of securing relief. After I had tried many advertised medicines in vain, I felt ready to despair. At last I saw Bile Beans for Biliousness advertised; and to see if they were superior to other medicines, I decided to give them a fair trial. With the first box I noticed an improvement in my condition. Apart from feeling more equal to my duties, I found that the sores on my face grew less and altered in colour, until one by one they disappeared altogether. I was also troubled no more with pains in my head.

I persevered with the use of the Beans, with the result, as you can see for yourself, that I have not now a single pimple left. My friends used to chaff me, saying my face was spotted all over. Now they are utterly astonished at the change in me. I also feel considerably improved in general health, and am no longer troubled by the headache and other symptoms of digestive trouble. I put my cure down entirely to Bile Beans."

Bile Beans for Biliousness are unequalled for indigestion, headache, eruptions, blood-impurities, pains in the back and chest, and other similar symptoms of stomach and liver disorder, palpitation, anæmia, all female ailments, constipation, piles, kidney complaints, loss of appetite, nausea and fulness after eating, nervous and general debility, colds, chill and rheumatism.

Obtainable of all chemists, or post free for price 1s. 1½d. or 2s. 9d., from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 and 120 London Wall, E.C. (2s. 9d. box contains 3 times 1s. 1½d.). Bile Beans are sold only in sealed boxes; never loose.

SULPHOLINE LOTION.

For clearing the Skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

SHILLING BOTTLES.

England, how could she know anything of our business? Besides, no woman would have the pluck to come out here and dig——"

As he spoke he was suddenly interrupted. Through the shrubs which surrounded them, through the dark night which enveloped the grounds, a strange cry broke the stillness. It was not a scream, it was not a laugh, yet the sound had in it something of each; it was a long, drawn-out cry, semi-hysterical, mocking, weird. And it was the cry of a woman!

It smote upon the ears of the two men, father and son, and conveyed to their hearts a sensation as of frozen iron being laid upon them.

For some seconds they could do nothing save stand where they had stood ere any unexpected interruption had occurred. Fear—abject fear—fixed their eyes, and prevented them looking at one another.

And then once more the cry came—low, long, harsh, and maddening in its mockery. It was plain that it came from not very far away.

"Come, Stephen!" whispered Roderick Vanstone, recovering himself. "It sounded close by. There is somebody in the grounds. It may be she. Come, our lives may depend upon it."

The two men seized their lanterns and rushed out of the shrubbery. Turning to the right, in the direction whence the cry had come, they halted a moment. In that moment another sound reached their ears. It was the sound of rustling skirts hurrying away.

"The gate!" whispered Roderick hoarsely. "Make for the gate; we may catch her."

Despite the darkness, they rushed along at a good rate. Stephen, some little distance ahead, could descry the figure of a tall woman hurrying through the grass towards the wall-gate. He sprinted, and was up to her just as she reached it. She, hearing him close on her heels, placed herself with her back to the gate and veered round.

"Now, madam, what are you doing in these grounds?" Stephen demanded. "Don't you know you are trespassing, and that if we send for the police you——"

"The police, ha, ha, ha!" Once more she gave that strange creepy, mocking laugh. "You send for the police! No; you won't do that!"

"Look here, madam," Stephen began, advancing as he spoke. But he halted in his steps and speech, for in a moment the woman's hand had dived under her blue cloak and came out holding a six-chambered revolver.

"Stand back further!" she commanded. "Don't come near me or—Ah! here's the fox."

She half-turned as she spoke, and faced the elder Vanstone, who had now come up.

"Who are you, woman?" he began; "and what right have you in these grounds?"

She threw on him a mocking glance, her fiery eyes full of contempt.

"Don't you know who I am?" she demanded.

Even though he had never set eyes on her before, one look at her face, perceptible by the light of a lantern, was sufficient to tell him who she was. The likeness to Cordelvin was altogether remarkable, while the similarity of those fiery eyes was unmistakable. Nevertheless, he replied to her question evasively.

"How should I know you? I have never seen you before."

"Have you ever seen anyone like me?"

He hesitated a moment, feeling that for appearance's sake he ought to refuse to bandy words with the trespasser and threaten to give her into custody. But something forbade him to do these things. He glanced at her face again, and then replied:

"No, madam, I have never seen anyone like you before!"

"Liar!"

The one word came out sharply, laconically, bitingly; like a pistol shot. It stung the elder man to fury. He stepped towards her angrily, seemingly not noticing the revolver. But in an instant the woman's hand was under her cloak, and a moment later Roderick Vanstone reeled back, his hands to his smarting eyes. With a handful of sand, Ruth Cordelvin had practised on him the very trick which had momentarily incapacitated Gerald Mortimer a few days before. Then, ere Stephen Vanstone could recover from surprise at the helpless condition of his father, the woman in the blue cloak had pulled open the gate, slammed it to, locked it with a key drawn from her pocket, and was gone.

CHAPTER XVII.

Detective Trench Strikes "A Little Tiny Reef."

In the days following his return to London after his brief sojourn in the neighbourhood of Moulstone, Detective-inspector John Trench had by no means left unfulfilled his expressed intention of "making a few inquiries."

It is the habit in these days among the portrayers of fictional detectives, to endow their heroes with a private practice, transcendent genius, and a strong propensity for sneering at the "incapacity and blundering stupidity of Scotland Yard." As compared with the aforementioned transcendent geniuses, the individual members of the Criminal Investigation Department possibly do appear dull of understanding. They may not be such masters of the deductive process as to build up a theory of a crime around a hairpin, or swear positively, after an examination of a collar-stud accidently found, what the unknown owner of the collar-stud ate for breakfast on the previous Tuesday week. At the same time, when Scotland Yard really wants to find anything out it has a pretty consistent habit of finding it out, as many a cocksure criminal has discovered to his cost.

Consequently, it is not to be wondered at that the comparatively simple problem of the whereabouts of Nina Penhurst was quickly solved by Inspector Trench. Such a thing as that was a matter of mere police routine.

Now, as chance (or perhaps design) would have it, Inspector Trench deferred calling upon Miss Penhurst till that very evening following the afternoon of her meeting with Gerald Mortimer. A very few minutes' conversation informed the astute officer that, as regards her participation in the murder of the man discovered among the ruins at Moulstone, she had had no more to do with it than he had himself. Nevertheless, his visit was far from fruitless. His politely put, but pressing inquiries resulted in his becoming acquainted with Nina's history, the detailing of which necessarily involved the enumeration of her relatives. Thus it came to Inspector Trench's knowledge that the murdered man was related to her and also that another cousin of hers was living at Streatham Hill. Something, too, he learnt of the characters of Roderick and Stephen Vanstone. Very little it is true, for Nina was more than reluctant to discuss them, but sufficient to make one of his professionally suspicious habit of mind desire to learn more. Perhaps her very reluctance fed his curiosity.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the next afternoon found him, in the guise of a worthy mechanic on the look-out for a job, sauntering up Streatham Hill, and taking from the most advantageous spot he could find, a careful look at the house in which Roderick Vanstone resided.

Sauntering up hills and viewing houses is an occupation which, like many others, is apt to pall and make one tired. John Trench felt he wanted a rest, and since, for the most part, social economy has appointed that public-houses shall furnish the sole resting-place for the needy wayfarer, it is small matter for surprise that the officer should enter a hostelry. What is perhaps a matter for greater surprise is that he should choose the identical public-house resorted to by Mark Burge when-

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ASTHMA

WHY ?? is it generally thought that there is no cure for

ASTHMA, CHRONIC BRONCHITIS, SHORTNESS OF BREATH, EMPHYSEMA, BLOOD-SPITTING, *HAY FEVER,* and other Lung Complaints.

BECAUSE ! ! the usual treatment only confine themselves to combating single symptoms instead of attacking the root of the disease.

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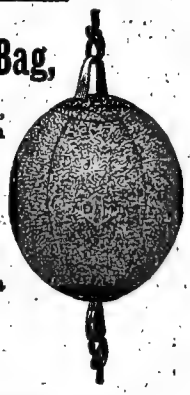

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All readers of Short Stories who have not yet secured a copy of Professor Boyd Laynard's famous book, **"Secrets of Beauty, Health, and Long Life,"** are advised to do so at once, as Messrs. Hammond, Hammond, and Co., the publishers, have been instructed by the author not to reprint any further cheap editions. As only a limited number of the cheap edition remains in stock, no time should be lost in ordering. We are at a loss to understand why this wonderful work, which has obtained such a gigantic sale in its low-priced edition, should be so suddenly withdrawn from the public. We are sorry that the Professor does not look higher than mere pecuniary profit.

To those readers who are not acquainted with this famous work, a complete syllabus, showing the contents of the whole of the **127 CHAPTERS**, enumerating upwards of **500 SUBJECTS** and divisions of subjects, can be had free on application to the publishers. The complete work, if ordered direct from the publishers on Order Form below, will be forwarded, carriage paid, for **ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE**, the same edition as sold in the ordinary way for Two Shillings.

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Mr. J. BAIRD, Railway Station, Denny, Stirlingshire, N.B., writes:—"I received your book all right, which I think is worth three times the price you charge for it. I have showed it to two or three companions, who are going to procure one."

Mr. B. C. HOWELLS, Manor House, Tamworth, Staffs. writes:—"I am writing a few lines to tell you I received book safely, and am greatly satisfied. It is a fair marvel and money's worth."

Mr. R. ROWED, Hanson Villa, near Stoughton, Guildford, writes:—"I beg to say I have received the book this morning, 'Secrets of Beauty, Health, and Long Life,' and I am very pleased with it. Can you supply me with six more copies?"

J. GOLIGHER, Esq., J.P., Londonderry, writes:—"I duly read your book, 'Secrets of Beauty, Health, and Long Life,' and am pleased with its contents. I shall be glad to hear what they will cost at, say, 100 copies at a delivery."

Mr. HORTON, Stagford Road, Brighton, writes:—"I bought a copy of you yesterday afternoon. I'd like another as soon as possible, for which I enclose 1s. 6d.

Sir JOHN DUNNE, Chief Constable of Carlisle, writes:—"I have read it with great interest. It gives most valuable information, and I feel quite persuaded that if its recommendations were generally adopted, health, long life, and happiness would to a great extent be the result."

Mr. J. BENNETT, Bolton, writes:—"I received Professor Boyd Laynard's book on 'Health, Long Life, &c.,' safely this morning. Thanking you for same, which is a splendid book on the above subjects."

Miss SCOTT, Alvingham, Louth, Lincs, writes:—"Kindly forward another copy of Professor Boyd Laynard's work on 'Secrets of Beauty, Health, and Long Life.'"

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Mr. A. BLACKAH, Tichfield Common, writes: "Secrets of Beauty, Health, and Long Life" is by far the best book of the kind I have ever seen."

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ever, as has been explained was often the case, that worthy could snatch a few minutes from duty as a body-servant to Mr. Cordelvin.

As is not infrequently the case in suburban hostelries in the daytime, the bar was empty when John Trench entered.

Having ordered some refreshment and having exhausted with the landlord conversation on the weather, the war, and the slackness of trade, he adroitly managed to introduce the subject of "the old house just down the road."

"Ah, it's a queer old place—very old, I believe," remarked the landlord. "You don't often find a house so nigh to London with so much ground around it. Why, you could put up two or three streets in them grounds and fetch in a pot of money out of the rents."

"That's true," asserted Trench, "but I s'pose now the people as lives there would rather have the ground than the money, eh?"

"Maybe so," returned the landlord. "The house, as I understand, has been in the Cordelvin family for generations, long before London extended out to here, when it was all fields and woods."

"Ah! and do the same family live there now?" asked the detective innocently.

"Well, they do and they don't," the other answered, "if you understand me. Certainly Mr. Anthony Cordelvin lives there, but he's—"the landlord touched his head significantly—"not quite the thing here, and he's getting worse from all accounts. Mr. Vanstone looks after his money for him."

Someone entered the bar at the other end as he spoke, and the landlord moved up to serve him. As the detective caught sight of the newcomer he gave the slightest start, and then turned away and lost himself in contemplation, as if trying to remember something.

The man stayed about ten minutes, talking to the landlord the while, and then departed.

"There's a man as could tell you more about the old house we was a-talkin' of than I can," the landlord remarked, coming back to the officer. "That's Mr. Burge; he's coachman to Mr. Vanstone."

"Indeed; funny he should have dropped in just when we were talking about the house."

That was all John Trench said on the subject to the landlord.

But when he departed shortly afterwards and took a cab for Scotland Yard it was significant that he should at once take down a big album of photographs, which completely monopolised his attention for the next two hours, at the end of which time he suddenly started, rushed with the album to get a better view under a gas-jet, and then, with a note of suppressed triumph in his tone, murmured:

"Oh, oh! so you're Mr. Burge now, are you? Coachman to Mr. Cordelvin, are you? H'm, and what's your little game in becoming a respectable member of society, eh? What business have you got to do it? When I spotted you this afternoon I thought I remembered seeing a turned-down ear like yours before. You're Mr. Burge now, maybe, but a few years ago you were Jim Blake, alias 'Pompey,' alias 'Tricky Martin,' and one of the smartest warehouse thieves that ever bothered the Force. You may be all right now. I know nothing about you at present; but I should very much like to know something about the estimable gentleman who has taken you into his employ as coachman, and what sort of references he got with you.

"Jack, my boy," he went on talking to himself, as was his way, "it looks as if you may have struck a little tiny reef. Anyway, you'll have to run over to Streatham again to-night."

(To be continued.)

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[*I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of* Short Stories.]

An Inattentive Husband.

I always like to hear from married correspondents in any little trouble they may have. For instance, "Frances P." often goes out with her husband, but he is most inattentive in little courtesies such as helping her with her jacket, or other necessary little services. If other men supply his deficiencies by being attentive to her he becomes very jealous, and there is trouble. How should she avoid this?

❦❦❦

Every man, "Frances," is at heart pleased if his wife is a social success. Even if this results in other men being too attentive to her, though he is jealous, there is a smothered compliment in the fact. Now you should trade on your husband's probable pride in you, and should put him through a rather drastic course.

❦❦❦

Instead of always appearing at your best when visiting, try a month or so of being at your worst. Upbraid him now and again about his inattentions, and fix as his punishment that so long as he neglects you, and objects to other men taking his place, you will either not visit with him, or if compelled to will not take any particular trouble in being unduly charming. This he will resent very much, and you can fix as your price of surrender that he should treat you in a proper way when out.

❦❦❦

Concerning Overtures.

"Musicus," like many another person, wants a sweetheart. Very suitable for the position is a young lady he knows, to whom he has been introduced. He wishes to pass pleasantly from the acquaintance, to the "spooning" stage, to use his own expression. How can he induce her, a modest, religious young lady, to come into line? Well, "Musicus," Spring is now here, and she is the best stage manager for love that I know. Choose a nice moonlight evening, and ask her if she would like a walk. Then talk romantically about nice things, and invite her to do the same. Then at a given moment apply the necessary gentle squeeze, and await results. If it "takes" at once, then all is well. If not, then apply twice or thrice the same treatment for successive moonlight nights. If this does not result in something, give it up, for she does not care for you.

❦❦❦

A Previous Love Affair.

Miss Maisie B. is engaged to a young man and is very fond of him, but he is not her first flame. Should she tell him of her former attachment, or should she keep it from him? I think it would be much better to gently break the news to him rather than allow it to leak out at some future date when he will gain the impression that she has been concealing something from him. I don't think there are many men who would resent such a confession.

❦❦❦

There is certainly a pretty general desire on the part of lovers to be "first in the field." It is not a very genuine sentiment, but rather a species of vanity. A man likes to think himself a Napoleon over something or other, be it only as victor over the most modest of damsels. But the idea has little more depth in it. Besides, is it not rather a compliment for him to realise that he has carried off the spoils, whereas a predecessor has failed to do so? I should advise "Maisie," in the course of conversation, to tell him that she has known what love is before, but never true and enduring love until she met her present sweetheart. The result gained from concealment is not worth the deception.

❦❦❦

Unreturned Love.

"Wilfred" (Southampton) likes but does not love a certain girl. She, for her part, loves but does not like him. She wishes him to walk with her always, but he prefers his male friends, thinking that once a week is all that the young lady ought to expect. How can he be friends with her, yet not compromised? She has six brothers and two sisters, to whom he has been introduced.

❦❦❦

You must be very careful indeed "Wilfred." Unless you really love her, it would be better to cease going out with her than to keep up the appearance of being fond of her, which must in the end cause a much wider breach than now. I think you should try and make it clear to her that you like her as a friend. As you know her relatives, the best way would be for you to see her at her house, rather than alone.

❦❦❦

When there, be as agreeable and nice as you can, not only to her but to her brothers and sisters as well. Cultivate the brothers particularly, and don't be averse to saying a nice thing occasionally to the two other sisters. This will make it clear that you are a social friend, while it will not compromise you so much as those walks alone with her. There is a way of expressing "like" which wants as much learning as that of showing "love," and I think the course suggested will convey the former to your satisfaction.

❦❦❦

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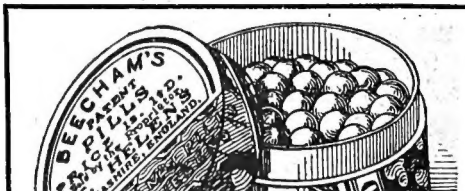

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